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THE MANHATTAN SERIES

OF

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No. 13.

A MODERN MIRACLE.

By JAMES FRANKLIN FITTS.

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A MODERN MIRACLE.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

ON THE third of June, 1873, the steamship Blucher, on the passage from New York to Bremen, foundered in mid-ocean. Of three hundred and fifty people on board, including officers and crew, less than seventy were saved in the boats.

Circumstances unnecessary to be detailed here brought me in contact, a year later, with one of the steerage passengers who was saved. He described to me, in a simple yet thrilling way, the frightful scenes of the night when the ship was discovered to be sinking, and the panic-stricken passengers crowded and fought for places in the boats.

"In the confusion that followed the alarm," he said, "I did not discover that I had put on another man's coat, and should not have minded it if I had discovered it at that time. Two days later, on the steamer that took up our boats, I examined the garment, and recognized it as the property of one of the crowd in the steerage who went down with the Blucher. He was not in any of the boats, so that death must have been his fate.

"He was a silent man, keeping by himself, and seemed moody. I did not learn his name before the disaster; but in his coat-pocket was a book full of pencil-notes, with the name 'Lawrence Galton' on the first page.

"Here is the book. I'll leave it with you. It

the sure foundation for prosperity and wealth. My ambition was to accumulate a great fortune, and it was plain at this time that I was on the sure road to realize that dream. I was mainly a practical, unsentimental kind of person, as was shown by my course and conduct during the war fever that swept the land from 1861 to 1865. I was a firm Unionist, and very anxious that the rebellion should be put down; I was willing to spend time and contribute money to that end, and to incite others, in season and out of season, to shoulder the musket and follow the old flag; but when it came to enduring the dangers and hardships of the field in my own proper person—there I drew the line. It seemed to me that my example and influence were worth much more to the great Union cause than my blood could possibly be; and besides, there was such a tempting amount of money to be made at home in Government contracts, and in taking shrewd advantage of the steady upward tendency of gold, stocks, and values generally. If there was anything wrong in my position I will not stop to justify it, since it was that of many thousands of other devout Union men. While the war lasted, then, I remained at home, presiding at war meetings, urging in emphatic speeches the vigorous prosecution of the nation's efforts to put down the rebellion; and I incidentally made some money. A thousand dollars of it I bartered for a substitute in 1864, when I was conscripted, and was sorry afterward to learn that the man was shot by the guard on the way to the front, in a desperate effort to desert. So painful to think that there were

those who seemed unable to rise to the height of sacrifice demanded of them in our great struggle for national existence!

But the war was happily over, I was steadily and surely prospering, and as a proof of the confidence and regard of my fellow-citizens I had been chosen an alderman at the last municipal election. That fact had everything to do with the matter of my present visit to the Mayor. He was about to visit the City of New York to examine material for the construction of sewers in our city, and I had promised him an hour's consultation before the train departed (which would be ten o'clock), so that he might have the benefit of my experience and advice.

The morning was bland and sunny. My heart was at ease as to my business affairs; I had the comfortable and reassuring feeling that a large profit was flowing in upon me; that in the natural course of events but a few years could pass ere I should become one of the wealthy class (of which the city had a very limited number), and a political magnate, as I wished to be. Such thoughts were flattering to me, but not satisfying; for at the age of twenty-eight I had missed the one golden prize which dwarfs all other attainments in comparison. The heart of the one woman I loved—of the only woman, it seemed to me, that I could ever love—had not only been denied me, but had been given to another.

There is always bitterness in the sweetest cup of life, and this was mine. And oh, how like a mockery it was to think that I had so nearly succeeded! To think that I had been encouraged by Georgia

Bard, the acknowledged belle and beauty of the village—for this was three years earlier—and had dreamed of life-long happiness with her, only to see her rudely snatched away from me by a handsomer, a richer, a wittier rival—Ellard Gorman!

Not in anger, and hardly in sorrow, after the amazing events of these later years, do I recount in as few words as may be the story of my unhappy love and bitter disappointment. It must all be told to make the narrative complete, but I will tell it briefly.

Georgia Bard was a peculiar person. I called her beautiful—ah, still loyal to my only love, I yet call her so!—and yet there were persons who insisted that she was only interesting, attractive, but not at all beautiful. These people were largely in the minority. She was the belle and beauty of Montville—so the village, the city, declared.

She came of a poor but highly respectable family. She was unusually well educated and accomplished; her mind was so stored with knowledge of a practical kind that busy and thoughtful men liked to converse with her. She was proficient in vocal and instrumental music, and could speak several modern languages. Her figure was slight and graceful; her face thin and pale, but with regular features and deep grey eyes; and her shapely head was crowned with luxuriant masses of brown hair. Her manner, her speech, were fascinating; to me they were simply entrancing.

In 1861, before the fervor of the great war was upon us, when I was twenty-three and she a year

younger, I had partially engaged her affections. I say *partially*, for I wish to do her no injustice. Looking back now, I can see that her heart was then given to me only with some careful reservations; indeed, she put them most plainly into speech one day when I declared my passion and begged her to make me the happiest man on earth by confessing that she loved me and by promising to be my wife. She turned her eyes seriously upon me, frankly gave me her hand, and said, without the least embarrassment:

"Mr. Hunt, since you have spoken so plainly, it is well that we should have an understanding. You have been very attentive and kind to me; others have, also; and I am ready to believe that your love for me is something a little better and likely to be more enduring than theirs. There, sir! Keep away! Hear me out! If I were like most girls, as you know I am not, I should fall into your arms and agree to marry you forthwith. But I can't do any such thing. I like you well enough, as I have just said, as a lover; but as a husband—ah, that is a different matter! Did you ever think how serious a thing it is for a man and a woman to take each other for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to live together after God's holy ordinance till death does them part?"

She repeated the question out of her recollection of the marriage service in the "Book of Common Prayer" without a smile. I broke in and passionately protested that never, never did man love woman as I loved her at that moment, and that I

only wanted the opportunity to make her life radiantly happy. I pressed her hand; I tried to put my arm about her and draw her to me; but she repulsed me with the utmost coolness.

"Don't forget yourself, Mr. Hunt," she said. "I am young, as you know, but have seen and read something of the world, and I don't mean to shipwreck my whole life with a disastrous marriage. No; don't speak! I will talk for you. I rather like you, to begin with, as I have said; but I'm not sure enough of you to marry you now—nor in less than two years. Don't look so blue! It is the best I can do for you. I'll give you a two years' trial. If at the end of that time you act and talk as you do now, and I feel then as much pleased with you as now, I will consent. These are my terms. I will not change them."

I begged and pleaded to no purpose. She was firm in her resolve. Reluctantly consenting, when words were spent, I implored her to kiss me. She turned a white cheek for my caress.

The reader will say that she did not love me. Perhaps not then; but life is long!

The incident just related happened early in 1861. Some weeks later came the firing on Fort Sumter, the call to arms, and the gust of patriotic feeling that swept the North.

I have related how, in my calculating way, I was a selfish patriot. Georgia, well read in the history of her country, and thoroughly sympathizing with the grand effort to keep it whole, entered heart and soul into the cause. All that woman could do for it,

she did. In the early months of the conflict, when so much was done out of blind enthusiasm, without much purpose or direction, she was the lady most frequently appearing upon the platform, at the great recruiting meetings, to sing the national airs or to recite some dramatic and patriotic selection, always receiving unbounded applause. Later, when the slaughter of dreadful battles filled the land with woe, she became the most active member of the Sanitary and Christian Commissions in our locality, laboring and organizing labor for the relief of our brave and unfortunate soldiers. I admired her now, as well as loved her; but she steadily put away all my proffered endearments.

"Your two years are not near spent," she would say, "and I am too busy with the needs of the soldiers to listen to you. Be patient, and you will receive your answer in time."

Working myself for the cause as I did, I had to be content with this poor encouragement, and with the privilege of being her escort to and from the meetings of ladies' aid societies and public assemblages where she was called to arouse enthusiasm with her clear, high tones, in the rendering of the "Star-Spangled Banner" or "Rally Round the Flag." During the two years that this continued, she never expressed a wish that I might join the Union army. Often I felt cut to the quick by hearing her warm eulogiums upon the cause and its defenders in the field, and less often I felt in a sluggish kind of way that it might be worth some peril and hardship to obtain such praise from such lips; but my feeling

on the subject never lasted over night, and for two full years I was kept on this unsatisfying probation. Yea, for more than two full years. The spring of 1863 was well advanced, May had come, but Georgia had not spoken. I waited with painful anxiety to hear her pronounce my fate, and all too soon I heard it.

It was the time when the two-year volunteer regiments were returning home from the fields of their pain and their glory, to be mustered out; and among the others came back the one which had gone forth from Montville. Eight hundred strong it left us; barely two hundred and fifty marched through the streets on its return, following the fifes and drums, stepping with veteran tread, with the shot-torn colors waving over them. More than two-thirds of the original number were sleeping their last dreamless sleep on all the fields from Yorktown to the Chickahominy, at Antietam and Fredericksburg, or were crippled and wasting at home or in hospital. At the head rode the colonel, Ellard Gorman, then about thirty years old, handsome and proud of bearing, still carrying one arm in a sling to ease a wound, not yet healed, of a Confederate bullet. And how the thousands, congregating in Montville from the whole county, shouted and roared their applause; how the ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and the flags flew from every window as the soldiers proudly marched by to the tune "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again!"

Then, and for weeks following, a large part of the

popular enthusiasm of greeting the regiment was concentrated upon its gallant colonel. I must speak of him as he was; no personal grief shall allow me to depreciate him. He had gone out in this organization in a subordinate position, and by great merit and valor had won his way to the head. Stories of his courage and skill in time of battle, his patience and devotion to his command in weary marches and trying campaigns, were multiplied, and he naturally became a live hero, of whom all Montville and its adjacent country were proud.

My own calamity followed quickly upon the tramp of the home-returning veterans. It was whispered about that Colonel Gorman, a prime favorite with all the loyal ladies of the place, had been seen and strongly attracted by the lovely face and ardent sympathies of Georgia Bard. She was a fearless equestrian; *I* would as soon have thought of riding a rainbow as a horse; but she now rode out each day under the escort of the Colonel, and a gallant pair they made. I was not long in perceiving that her manner toward me was becoming more indifferent than ever; and promptly taking the alarm, I sought an explanation. She gave it without evasion.

"There has been nothing but candor between us from the first," she said, "and I will not dissemble now. You will remember that I told you I must have two years in which to make up my mind. Well, I am decided. You might have seen for yourself, and saved this unpleasant interview. I cannot marry you."

"You never loved me!" I cried, with reproach in face and voice.

"No; do not say that," she calmly protested. "I think I did at one time—a little. But I was not sure of my affections; and marriage is a *very* serious business, Weldon! However, I have found a man who has shown me my heart as it is. He has not asked me for it yet, but I expect that he will. You look surprised to hear me talk thus. Why should I not, when I feel so deeply? I tell you, after seeing and knowing Ellard Gorman, I can never love another man! No; not if my years should be prolonged to thousands!"

Strong words, even for so strong a character as Georgia Bard to utter; and no doubt she believed them. But the hour was approaching when I should recall that passionate declaration and wonder anew at that complex riddle of the ages—the human heart!

I knew that efforts at dissuasion would be but as so much idle breath. I stood humbled, distressed before her. She looked at me with a certain attempt at compassion in her face—just as you may spell out a gentle expression from one of the great stone countenances along the Nile. She held out her hand. I took it and bent my head over it. I did not kiss it, but a tear fell upon it.

"I am sorry for you, Weldon," she said—"very sorry; but it was inevitable."

Thus it ended; or, rather, thus I thought it had ended. In my bitterness I foreswore matrimony for all my life, and that vow I had kept down to this day in the May of 1866.

CHAPTER II.

MY HEAVY CROSS.

IN THE first access of grief and disappointment upon my rejection by Georgia Bard, I thought of disposing of every business interest that I had at Montville and quitting the place forever. My feeling was a good deal that of other young men under similar circumstances—that there remained little or nothing to live for after the loss of the cherished object upon whom the heart was set. But, though still young, I had too much good sense to give up entirely to the wretchedness of the situation. Keeping about my usual pursuits, and striving to absorb myself in them, I slowly got the better of my passion; that is, I became able to control it. To overcome it and make it as though it had never existed was impossible; that I well knew.

The heart of the masculine lover is a curious thing! I tried my best to reason myself into an angry frame of mind against Georgia. "See, now," I would say, or think, in my solitude, "what kind of a woman she is. As she said, she was rather drawn to you at first; she was quite willing to keep you dangling about her in suspense; and had this wonderful colonel never appeared upon the scene, she possibly would have married you. But with his

advent she throws you over as coolly as though she had never cared a straw for you. He is very wealthy; he is big, rosy, and hearty in voice and manner, a kind of Jove among men, and he has all the glory of a soldier's career to draw upon. *You*, on the contrary, are somewhat undersized, not a great specimen of manly beauty, and rather reserved in your ways. While your successful rival was leading his gallant regiment in battle, you were living quietly and safely at home, making money in war speculations. And so ——".

This was the turn that my reflections always reached. Beginning with severe mental reproaches upon Georgia for her inconstancy, they were sure to end with a comparison between my successful rival and myself, which justified her conduct, as far as anything could.

People are not always considerate of the distress of the disappointed lover; and in my case I had to bear a great deal in the way of jokes and quips from the men and maidens of Montville on the subjects of "being cut out," "getting the mitten," and so forth. These thoughtless jests I schooled myself to bear with outward composure, and soon outlived them all.

I had in those sorrowful days one source of consolation so strange and unusual that the reader will hardly be able to understand at first how it could be so. That source was Colonel Gorman himself, the man for whom I had been rejected!

Of course, the correct and natural thing, according to all romance, was that I should hate him and

try to injure him in some underhanded way. But as I am not writing romance, the truth compels me to say that as the edge of my grief became blunted I found considerable solace in the fact that I had been supplanted (since it was inevitable) by one so much my superior in every way as was Ellard Gorman.

As for hating him, I never had that feeling at all. Regarding him at first as one whom I did not wish to meet, on account of what had occurred, and resolving that my intercourse with him should always be of the briefest and most formal, I was surprised to find how he won my respect and admiration as we were thrown together in society and business. His nature was so large, his manner so hearty and genial, that the man must have been a boor indeed who could resist him. There are men as well as women who are naturally captivating, and Colonel Gorman was of this kind. He attracted me so strongly that I began to feel that real friendship was likely to grow up between us, notwithstanding what had occurred. Though he must have known what my relations with Georgia had been, he never referred to the painful subject, but treated me with the utmost courtesy and consideration.

I think it was about Christmas of 1863 that they were married. The Colonel had talked of returning to the army; but the broken bones of his wounded arm did not knit properly, and he had to undergo a painful operation which left him a semi-invalid all that summer and fall. He was with Georgia much of the time, and an early day for the wedding was

the consequence. Ah, that wedding! It was a grand and joyous affair; people said that Montville had never seen the like. I will not describe it; I will merely say that I was not a guest, but wished them both all happiness.

CHAPTER III.

FORTUNE'S FAVORITES.

IN DECEMBER, 1863, they were married, as I have said. During the nearly two years and a half that had elapsed down to the May of 1866 Colonel Gorman steadily rose to be the foremost figure of the town; his business and public prosperity as well as the happiness of his domestic relations were the talk of the place.

In judging of men and women, as well as in estimating other things, we must be largely guided by appearances; and the Montville people, by this test, declared without dissent that Ellard Gorman was the happiest, the most fortunate of men, his wife the most charming, the most satisfied of women. So it appeared.

He had large hereditary wealth, to begin with, and had greatly increased it by shrewd and fortunate speculations. It was thought that at this time he could not be worth less than three hundred thousand dollars.

He continued to grow in the estimation of the people of Montville. He had not only the dashing and showy qualities that had made him successful in the army and in society, but he also displayed sound business ability and judgment. He was chosen the first mayor of the city by a large major-

ity, and his second election had been practically without opposition.

His house was the grandest house in that region, finely situated on an eminence commanding a view of the city, the valley and the river beyond, with a glimpse of the distant mountain line. I had never visited it, but had been told that it was a marvel of showy architecture and luxurious furnishing, while its flower and landscape gardens could not be excelled in beauty in a circuit of a hundred miles.

Many entertainments had been given there during these years; brilliant parties in winter and lawn-festivals in summer; so that the society people of Montville had been furnished ample opportunity to observe the married life of the pair and their home surroundings. There was but one opinion; there was every reason why they should be happy; nothing was lacking to make them so; and their whole conduct and demeanor in public showed that they were really and truly so.

It was noted that Colonel Gorman was the perfection of cordial hospitality. Each guest or visitor at his charming home was certain to be welcomed by its master in a way that left no doubt of his sincerity, and to be placed perfectly at ease. All felt and acknowledged the charm of his manner, and the almost magnetic power that he had to please and entertain with his conversation. He could talk of anything and everything, and those with whom he conversed were not only charmed but profited.

His lovely wife acted as naturally in her new position as though she had been born to it. She

presided easily and gracefully at the hospitable table of this grand home, and at the festivals and receptions that were given there. She was pleasant, affable, kind in speech and manner to all; and the frequent expression that I heard was—"Well, her husband ought to be proud of her."

All this I had heard, not seen; for, as I have said, I had never visited the Gorman home. Not that I lacked invitations; these came to me often; but there was still a sore spot in my heart that I thought it best not to inflame by too close a view of Georgia's wedded happiness. That I was now, at the time this narrative opens, about to visit the Mayor at his mansion, was due to a sudden and unexpected necessity. I knew that he was about to go to New York on municipal business; some information had reached me over night which must be communicated to him, and I feared that I should not have time to say all I wished should I defer seeing him until he reached the railroad station. The train would be due in an hour, and I saw that it had become necessary for me to see him at his house. I had so advised him, and he had returned a cordial invitation to come.

But while it is true that I had not had the opportunity to witness the devotion of this favored couple to each other in their conduct at home, I had seen it elsewhere. I had noticed how, when their carriage stopped before the church, the concert-hall, even the stores, the Colonel was ever careful to assist his wife to the pavement, and the smile that she invariably gave him. At the delightful band-

concerts in the Park on summer nights I had seen them promenading together in the throng, arm in arm, just like a pair of young lovers—as they were. Rumor said that in that wet and unhealthy spring, when the Colonel had a severe congestive chill and was confined to the house for a week, his wife was herself almost prostrated with anxiety and watching. The doctors said that it required something more than persuasion to make her take any rest.

It seems idle for me to multiply these evidences of the mutual devotion of this pair, which all Montville saw, knew, and believed. If I add now a chapter of another sort, it will be only because the person whom it mainly concerns will have much to do with the future of the story.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EPISODE.

I HAVE heard it said that the average man has a kind of antipathy to his relatives. That is, he will appear decorously affectionate and loyal to them before the world, but will smack his lips over their failures and shortcomings with a zest that he would not feel in the case of mere strangers. I don't know the philosophy of this species of cynicism, and I don't care to know it. Can it be (admitting its truth) that the average man is absurdly jealous of the rivalry of his own blood?—as to which he surely ought to be magnanimous and unselfish, if those qualities are in him.

I have stated a problem, and will not stop to analyze it. I merely make the statement of it the basis for saying that no such narrow feeling animated me in regard to my cousin, Julia Bement.

She was my second cousin, so far removed in the scale of consanguinity that in my boyish days I used to regard her as not at all a relative, but a little sweetheart. In those days her parents had removed to what was then the "far West," and Julia had fitted herself for the occupation of a teacher, which to most of the young women of America of that day seemed to come as a second

nature. For many years I had not heard of her, when early in 1865 came a letter from her which interested me much. She told me that her parents were dead, and that she was alone in the world. She had been and was successful as a teacher—she could not ask for greater success than was promised her in this vocation—but she was lonely. Her talk had a refreshing frankness about it which won my instant admiration for her, and my determination to aid her in attaining the object she sought.

"My dear Weldon," she said, "I remember you as a very truthful and rather stupid boy. That is frank, certainly; let me add that you always manifested a high degree of boy-love for me, which I would like to draw upon now. I am almost thirty years old—somewhat older than you, I know. I am here at the Wild West, in a new and stirring city on the projected line of one of the Pacific Railways, where everything is chaos, where incipient civilization jostles aboriginal barbarism, where women are scarce and *dear*, where I am very useful, always in demand, but where every other man I meet wants to marry me. If you could see some of them! Not Robinson Crusoe in his attire of dressed skins would look more uncouth to me than do some of these red-shirted, slouch-hatted and long-booted men who are building the railroads and the towns, some of whom assure me that they were graduated from Yale and Harvard (their manners rather prove it), and who will listen to no compromise from me short of matrimony. My dear cousin, rescue me! The fact is, I have a profound distrust for the whole

race of men. I don't wish to marry anybody. I simply want to teach school all my days, as I am well qualified to do. That I may say without vanity—as witness the within testimonials. I have yearning recollections of Montville; I presume that most of the people there now would not remember me; but still it would seem something like home, and I shouldn't be persecuted out of my life with offers of marriage. Get me a teacher's place somewhere in your schools, and show that you are worthy to be called Julia's cousin."

Under the badinage of this characteristic letter I detected a tone of anxiety, and straightway set myself to work to accomplish what she desired. I found it no difficult task. A vacancy in the place of preceptress of the Montville High School had just occurred, and my cousin Julia's application was most timely. With the recollection which some of the trustees had of her in her early years, with the strong credentials which she forwarded, with my unsparing efforts for her, reinforced at last by those of Mayor Gorman, whom I succeeded in interesting in her cause, I was enabled to send her the appointment within a week after the receipt of her letter.

She came to Montville; she filled the first place in the female department of the school for a year with universal applause and acceptance. The scholars loved and reverenced her; the Board went about rubbing their hands and saying, "Ah, but we've got a jewel of a preceptress now; and much thanks to you, Mr. Hunt, for bringing her to our notice!" It

was conceded on all hands that no woman had ever taught in that place who had the practical knowledge, the ability to impart it, and the command of the affections and obedience of her overflowing department of young ladies, that were exhibited by Miss Bement.

And yet, at the very height of her career of prosperity here—when, as I may say, she was largely the idol of both pupils and parents, and when it was reported that she had received several most advantageous offers of marriage—she abruptly resigned and returned to the West.

To those who were most nearly drawn to her she would state no definite reason for her surprising action.

"I am a creature of whims," she would say. "I left an excellent place and a most affectionate people at Wycaseo, far beyond the Mississippi, on a kind of a whim, and I am leaving you in Montville now for no better reason. Well, why not? If women may not have their whims, who can?"

I remember how she impressed me when I met her at the Montville railroad-station on her arrival, as I hurried there in answer to her telegram. How Cousin Julia would appear or act, I had not the faintest idea; but I conceived that a professional school-mistress ought to look old-maidish, even if young, and to have an absent and *distrait* air about her. I was looking for such a person when the train drew in and the issuing passengers thronged the platform, and then a hand was laid lightly on my arm.

"Pardon me," said the lady, "but you are expecting somebody. Can it be me? I am Julia Bement."

I took her hand and welcomed her warmly. The rights of cousins are world-known; she lifted her mouth to my kiss with the utmost placidity.

On our way to the carriage, on the ride to the boarding-house where I had engaged rooms and board for her, I had a chance to study her, aside from her conversation, which was instantly pleasant and agreeable — a large woman, built in nature's kindest mold, with a grand head, strong features, a dark eye and dark complexion, with hair to match, all of which might have put acquaintance at a distance but for the smile that welcomed and reassured you. It sunned her whole face, disclosed her white teeth, and shone brightly in her dark eyes. It was like mirth and gladness waiting upon intellect; and her voice was as exquisite an organ as ever dwelt in human frame.

I smile in reviewing what I have here written. It will be said that I was in love with my cousin Julia. Far from it, indeed! I was proud of her; proud of her stately beauty, of her intellect, and of her success. That she was my relative, augmented my pride. This was the beginning and the end of my feeling for her. But there were certain passages between us during her brief year in Montville whose import I could not then understand, but which subsequent events have led me to clearly interpret.

The Mayor, as such, was a member of the Board

of Education, and his visits to the schools made him acquainted with Miss Bement. She was included in the invitations for the next reception at the Gorman place; in fact, she became a frequent guest there afterward.

She knew that I never entered Colonel Gorman's home. I suppose she knew the reason why, as probably everybody else in Montville knew it. No conversation as to this ever passed between us; but I used to talk with her, hungry to hear her opinion as to the domestic relations of the Gormans. To my astonishment, I found her skeptical as to their great happiness.

"Why, Julia," I said, "you surprise me. What can possibly lead you to think that they are not happy?"

She shrugged her shapely shoulders. "I merely intimated a doubt, Cousin Weldon," she said. "Please don't draw me into an argument."

"But the doubt must have been founded on something you have seen or heard between them. What was it?"

"Nothing. To all the world they are the most loyal, the most loving pair that ever lived. If you ask me for proof, I can't bring an item to the contrary. That is the way Montville knows them; I suppose they will be known that way till the death of one or the other of them. I only give you my opinion."

"But your opinion must be founded on observation. You must have seen something to justify it. And as you stand alone in that opinion—as no one

before you has ventured to suggest that the Gormans were not as happy privately as they seem to be publicly—pray, tell me what are the grounds for your belief?"

I remember that her face was very serious as she answered my question. There was a world of meaning in her black eyes, could I have understood it. Looking back upon the conversation now, I recall that I was surprised at the depth of feeling that she showed.

"Cousin, let us not pursue this subject any further. I only judge, from my acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Gorman, that she is not the woman he should have married. Perhaps I am wrong; this is only a guess. Just regard it as such, and say nothing about it. I hope they are happy; but I don't believe it."

When in the spring of the year 1866 I learned that her resignation as preceptress had been sent in, I hastened to her and urged her to withdraw it. I pleaded the case with her as fervently as I could. I reminded her of the esteem in which she was held by the whole people of Montville, and of the love with which the children regarded her. She looked serious, but said nothing. I hinted at an increase of salary; she shook her head. I bluntly said that if she had a reason for this sudden and unreasonable departure she ought to make it known. She looked at me in a weary kind of way, and persisted in her refusal.

"Weldon," she said, "there are the very best of reasons impelling me to do as I am doing; but you

will never know what they are. My dear cousin, this is a world of mysteries; be content when you have fathomed the least of them. This one will never be revealed."

So she left us.

CHAPTER V.

A FAIR OUTSIDE.

THE WALK from my hotel in the city out to the suburbs where the Gorman mansion was situated was one of something more than a mile. I briskly pursued it, reflecting upon all these things, which ordinarily would have troubled me only as sad reminiscences. But there was something in one idea that gave me a little tremor; and the more I thought of it the more the feeling increased. I was going to this mansion for the first time. For two years and a half I had seen its mistress—the one woman whom I could love—but casually; never in such a situation that I could exchange more than the ordinary commonplaces of conversation with her. Nor did I hope or wish to do more than that now; indeed, I hoped not to see her at all. Trust me, it is an awkward business to sit down *tete-a-tete* with the woman you have loved, whom you fancied loved you, and try to find something to say adequate to the occasion. You may talk together, but there will be no soul in it. You may give her the current coin of compliment and pass the gossip of the hour, but she knows well enough what you are thinking of. She probably thinks much faster than you do; and even if she be happy in her husband and her home, your presence will incite disagreeable

queries in her mind, in which, perhaps, you will be an intruding figure.

Ah, the might-have-been! The great impossible, never to be eliminated from our lives!

I entered the gate at Gorman place, and walked up the wide, flowery terrace to the house.

Mr. Mayor Gorman was sitting by the open window of a front parlor, robed in a florid dressing-gown, smoking a cigar. Observing my approach, he met me at the door and welcomed me with effusion. He looked like a picture of masculine health and contentment as he gave me both hands, drew me into the parlor, seated me in a great, yawning easy-chair, provided me with a cigar and a light, and never ceasing to talk, proceeded to put me at my ease.

"I'm extremely pleased to see you here, Mr. Hunt," he said. "I was fearing we should never have that pleasure. You knew I was going to New York? Yes, but I have learned that the train is two hours late; a washout up at Overton, or something of that kind; so I am taking my ease here for awhile; my big valise went up to the station an hour ago. How are you, anyway? I believe I haven't seen you before for at least twelve hours."

There was a little touch of drollery in his talk and manner, as well as heartiness, that was irresistible. He was captivating, as usual, taking me by storm in spite of myself.

"Do you care to see the house?" he went on. "It's a large place, and there are people who are kind enough to think that there's a good deal in it and

about it to see. But you shake your head—you've got something to say. Very well, my boy, go ahead. Business affairs waylay me at every turn, and would keep me awake o' nights if I would let them. What is it, Mr. Hunt? Oh, I remember; you want to talk *sewer*."

I told him my errand at once, and for thirty minutes we talked business. The details of that conversation are entirely immaterial here. I may well pass over the particulars of the information that I gave him about kinds, quality and price of sewer-pipe, and where he could find it in the metropolis. He listened attentively, asked some questions, and made a few pencil-notes in his diary. Our business concluded, I rose to depart.

"Don't go," he said, looking at his watch. "I've an hour on my hands yet before it will be time to go to the station. Now you're here, you must see Mrs. Gorman. She'd hardly forgive me if I let you go without presenting you."

He put his hand on a bell-pull. I became somewhat agitated, which he noticed.

"What's the matter with you?" he brusquely asked. "Any reason why you can't see my wife?"

"Oh, no; only—I am not used to making morning calls—and—and I am not dressed as I should like to be for ladies' company."

Colonel Gorman heard my lame excuses, laughed, told me to sit down again, and directed the domestic who answered the bell to tell her mistress that there was a gentleman in the red parlor who wished to see her. I stared at him in confusion.

"Well, is not that so?" he asked, in his bantering way. "If you *don't* want to see my wife, you're almost the only man in Montville who don't."

"Why, certainly," I stammered; "it would give me great pleasure to pay my respects to Mrs. Gorman."

"To be sure. The men all admire her, and I'm quite willing they should. By Jove, sir, I should have a poor opinion of the man who couldn't admire such a fine woman as Mrs. G. No jealousy about *me*, Hunt; not an atom. I can't understand how a man with a handsome and accomplished wife could be satisfied unless she had her full share of admiration. In my case, I take all this approbation of Mrs. Gorman as a tribute to my good taste in marrying her; and then, you see, the popular applause lavished on the lady gives me a much higher conception of the value of my prize. Where some men make fools of themselves with causeless jealousy, I find my satisfaction increased. You are going to find, when you marry, Mr. Hunt, that there are several ways for a fond husband to view the attractions of the finest woman in the world—as, of course, a man's wife must always be in his own eyes. Let me recommend *this* way to you."

It was just such a hearty and unique speech as the Colonel often made, and his face expressed the utmost good humor as he spoke. Why, then, was it that I fancied a slight tone of irony, just a flavor of acid, in his voice and words? Possibly I was looking for something of the kind. I remember that my cousin Julia's skeptical remarks had passed

through my mind as I walked up there that morning.

I was saved the necessity of answering the Colonel's outspoken reflections by the entrance of his wife.

She greeted me with a charming smile and a frankly-offered hand. I had not seen her for some weeks—for months I had not exchanged even a casual word with her upon meeting—and she appeared to me now like a vision of beauty and grace, more charming than I had ever seen her, coming in her simple morning costume, the very plainness and simplicity of which seemed to me to enhance her charms. She gave me a cordial pressure of the hand, and took a seat on the sofa near me, while her husband sat facing us in a large easy-chair.

"This is indeed a surprise," she said, in her sweet, silvery tone. "Remembering how many of my invitations you have slighted, I may be allowed to wonder that I now have the pleasure of seeing you here, Mr. Hunt, welcome as you are."

"He's not entitled to the least credit, Georgia—from you, anyway," Mr. Gorman insisted. "He came to see me on business. I believe he came *here* only because he was afraid that he couldn't depend on seeing me long enough at the station. Is that so, Hunt?"

"I believe it is. But I am none the less fortunate in having the unexpected pleasure of seeing Mrs. Gorman."

"You speak the meaningless language of flattery, sir!" said the lady, with a pleasantly-assumed se-

verity. "You are at fault, Mr. Hunt, and you know it, for continually slighting us. However, you may make your excuses some other time. I must not be hard upon you on the first occasion of your entering my house."

I answered something; what, I know not. My composure and the use of my tongue were regained only with a struggle, which was not yet over. And she sat so near to me that I could have touched her with my outstretched arm, placid and smiling. Her husband sat near us, careless and nonchalant, not suspecting, as I thought, the pain that this *tete-a-tete* was giving me.

For it was painful! The old fires, which I thought were smothered by the lapse of years and her possession by another, now broke forth at sight of her here in this happy and luxurious home, with the fortunate and deserving man by her to whom she was linked for life. Who was it that said love is merely the creation of circumstance and propinquity, and that it may be starved and conquered, the same as a fever of the body? It is not so. Sitting there that morning, knowing how hopeless, how sinful was the passion, I confessed to myself that I loved that woman as firmly, as deeply as ever. The mere sight of her there distressed me. Nothing but the proprieties of social intercourse, to which even bleeding hearts must defer, restrained me from seizing my hat and rushing abruptly from the house, to relieve my distress.

The conversation went on, and added to my agony.

"I believe, Georgia," said the Colonel, "that Mr. Hunt was one of your early acquaintances."

"Oh, yes. I knew him a long time before I knew you."

"Indeed! Well—excuse me, my dear; but I've sometimes wondered why the young fellows of that day in Montville—yourself among them, Mr. Hunt—did not make better use of their opportunities before I came upon the scene."

"Oh, you ungenerous man! I supposed you knew that I was waiting for you, or for some man just like you."

"To be sure, Georgia; and I'm glad, indeed, that you did not grow weary waiting. Still, I might be excused for thinking I had narrowly escaped losing you before I found you. What, I wonder, would have happened if Hunt had courted you before I came as zealously as I did afterward?"

What could the man intend by such talk? It seemed to me to go far beyond the familiar levity in which a husband might indulge with his wife as to the time when both were single. The question gave me a most uncomfortable pang, and I looked at Mrs. Gorman, fearing to see her overwhelmed with confusion.

Nothing of the kind! She gave a sprightly laugh, looked at me with something like coquetry in her eyes, and shook her finger with assumed displeasure at her husband.

"Now Ellard—how can you!" she said. "Mr. Hunt and I were very good friends, just as most of the nice young men of Montville and myself were;

just as we all are now, I trust. You well know, you provoking man, why I waited for you—or for one like you. We were all heated with the war fever, then. I had pretty nearly vowed to marry a soldier; and you happened to be the one."

"Ah, yes, madam!—how much do I owe to brass buttons and shoulder-straps! The war did a great deal for me, certainly; among other things, it qualified me to be your husband, my dear. Mr. Hunt, I fear you did not improve your opportunity. The war is over, its glories are vanishing, we are getting to be one people again, and you may never have the chance of winning a fair maiden's heart by the fame of gallant soldiership. Well, well—there are other fields where you may display your chivalry; remember that you are an Alderman of the City of Montville at this moment! Meantime, until you repair the injustice your celibacy has inflicted upon Mrs. Gorman's captivating sex by wedding one of them, please let us see you here often. Don't be churlish and refuse our invitations. Now it's time to go to the train, and I must change my coat. Excuse me, both of you."

Georgia and I were left alone together.

The situation would have seemed from the first moment embarrassing to me, but for what had gone before. Having listened with some surprise to the light and bantering conversation that had occurred between this husband and wife, I taking little part in it, I naturally supposed that she would continue the same strain when left with me.

She did nothing of the kind. The brightness all

went out of her face; it grew hard and almost defiant. With the quickness of thought I wondered how *that* face could suffer such a change.

"You never came here expecting to see *me*, this morning?" she abruptly questioned.

"Why—my call was on business—but——"

"I see. And you did not ask my husband to call me down?"

I hesitated.

"Weldon"—she used the name as she had used it years before—"tell me! Did you request to see me?"

"Perhaps I ought to have done so; but I did not."

"I knew you did not. It was like *you* to be considerate of me, and not unnecessarily to give me pain. And it was like the man who has just left this room to insist on putting me on exhibition before you, so that the fame of our happiness and domestic harmony might be still further extended. The brute! He has no care for my feelings; he has known well enough that I was grateful to you for keeping away from me, yet he has persisted in sending you invitations, though I begged him not to do so; and now, you happening to be here on business, he must call me in and harrow my heart with his talk about the days when I was free, and when some perverse fate made me prefer him to you. Oh, God! What refinement of misery is this! Wedlock without love—almost with loathing!"

Her jeweled hands covered her fair face; tears trickled through her fingers; her slight frame shook with her sobs.

I sat there aghast, nearly stunned by the discovery that had been forced upon me. Dumbly I looked at her, my heart beating fast, speech denied me.

This phase of her emotion passed as quickly as it had come. Her perfumed handkerchief dashed the tears from her eyes and cheeks; and though the color came faintly to her face, both face and voice were still hard.

"Weldon," she said, "a woman may not always control herself; not even such a woman as I. You have learned in a breath what I meant to take to my grave unrevealed. But I have been tried beyond my strength; patience, discretion, everything has given way under the cold, mocking heartlessness of that man. And he promised to love, honor, and protect me! Oh, heaven!

Her little hands were clinched. Her eyes had a fierce glitter.

I forgot that she was a wedded wife. Indeed, had not her anger been teaching me to forget it? The old passion surged up in my heart. I found my voice, and spoke in a delirium of hope, an ecstasy of overwhelming joy!

"Georgia—dear, dear heart—blessings be forever upon you for what you have said! I have not been —I never can be—a man without you. Do you still give me hope? Life is long—I will be discreet —I can wait. Some day you will be free from these hateful bonds, and then——"

She repulsed me as I tried to take her hand. Calmly, quietly, as though no tempest had just ruffled her soul, she looked into my eyes and spoke:

"Weldon, forget the folly you have heard from me. Promise me that while I live no mortal shall ever hear of it. When I die—and sometimes I think that will be soon—I shall not care what is said. Because I have been provoked beyond my strength, and have said to you what no wife should say, promise me that you will faithfully keep locked in your breast what I have unwittingly disclosed. Promise—in the name of the love you once bore me."

"I do promise, Georgia. I swear it, with my hand on my heart! And now, having vowed that to you, can you not give me hope? I tell you, such a love as mine can wait for years. I cannot stifle it; I would not if I could. O woman, woman! grievously as you wronged the heart that adored you, yet there may be reparation now. There may be——"

"There is none," she faintly said.

"I will wait! God never meant that we two should be divorced forever, even in this world. In honor, in law, without sin or reproach, the way will yet be opened for us to be united."

For a moment her face was filled with inexpressible tenderness; for an instant she yielded her hand to me.

"I am punished, Weldon," she said, with a voice as dreary as the wind wailing over untuned harp-strings. "I am punished for my pride and false ambition. My punishment is almost greater than I can bear. I have not only devoted myself to life-long misery, compelled to wear a smiling mask while

the face beneath was all woe—but I have filled *your* life with bitterness. Well, the error is beyond repair. We must both suffer. I must go on in all the weary years that may be before me, acting a lie to the world, as I have been doing. You, if you are sincere in this——"

"Georgia!"

"Well—grant it—you must continue to suffer. There is no more to be said. I foolishly, weakly bound myself to a man whom I admired, trusting that love would follow our union. *Love?* Oh, why do I profane that sacred name, in mentioning it with *his!* God help me! Admiration and love are gone together, destroyed by the hard experience of a few brief years of living with him. But there is something left, Weldon Hunt! It is honor! It is the woman's duty to herself—to her obligation, if not to her husband—to society—to her God! I thank Him that He has been merciful and denied me children. Their baby hands upon my face, their prattling voices in my ear, might have softened me toward him who would have been their father. Weldon, this interview has lasted too long; it had better never happened. You were right in never seeking me; you knew your own feelings; I have told you too much of mine. Go away, and try not to see me anywhere hereafter where we might be brought face to face and compelled to talk. My trials are painful enough without that."

She sobbed; she strove in vain to prevent it. Again I sought her hand; again she repelled me.

"You give me no hope," I bitterly cried.

"Yes," she replied.

"You do? Oh, where; how——"

She changed her seat to the piano-stool. Softly, sweetly, like the cadences of a long-forgotten melody, she struck the accompaniment of a song that in those days had captured the popular heart, because it had in it so much of that "touch of nature" that "makes the whole world kin." Nobody sings it now, but it lingers here and there in memory.

"Do you recognize it?" she asked.

"Ah, do I not! You used to play it for me—and sing the song."

Just one stanza of it she sang now. Her voice had first and last entranced thousands during those busy and stirring days of the war; but ah! she never put the pathos into any song that breathed and sobbed as she sang those words to me that morning, beginning:

I struggled to forget,
  But my struggle was in vain;
It is years since last we met,
  And we may not meet again.

Her fingers, whiter than the keys, were raised from them. With composure she now regarded me.

"It is your answer," she said.

"But you spoke of hope," I protested.

"Yes; there is hope. In heaven, Weldon."

My head fell on my breast. My brain whirled; I was dimly conscious of my surroundings, but weariness possessed me; I should have delighted in the presence of death at that moment. The soft notes from the piano came to my ear as I might have

dreamed them; when they abruptly paused, I started and looked up. Colonel Gorman had just returned to the parlor.

He came back as brisk and effusive as he went. He had donned a new business suit, and I thought, as he stood just inside the door contemplating us, rubbing his hands and beaming with smiles, that he was a perfect picture of florid health and manly beauty.

"Ah—Mrs. Gorman at the piano," he began. "Glad you were able to get her there, Hunt; no offense, Georgia, but you know you haven't played much lately. 'Tis the way of all married ladies, I hear.

"Our friend has been well entertained, of course; trust Mrs. G. for that. Well, I'm sorry to break up so agreeable a call, but my time's nearly up; I must start for the station. However, that need not disturb you, Mr. Hunt; stay, and welcome. You've been so long coming that you won't need any excuse. Still, I'd like your company myself for awhile."

Again I thought I detected just the least flavor of the bitter in his speech. Yet he smiled as he spoke; his wife smiled back; and I presume that I, too, out of courtesy, assumed an agreeable expression which did not at all reflect my feelings.

"I thank you for your kind words, Mr. Gorman," I said, "but I prefer not to tarry. These are business hours, you know, and I am sure that Mrs. Gorman will excuse me."

"Very well; you'll be welcome any time, remem-

ber. Stay a bit; I think I'll walk to the station; it's not very far. My dear, please send word out to the stables for Patrick to put up the horses. Hunt, I'll walk along with you as far as our ways lie together."

I bowed to Mrs. Gorman and passed out into the hall. I supposed—who would not?—that between any husband and wife inhabiting the same house, upon a parting that was to last a week, there would be some show of affection. I thought it probable that a kiss might be exchanged, and any of us would desire to relieve such an occasion of possible embarrassment.

As I stood in the hall my back was turned to them. Before me was a branching hat-tree, in the center of which was a large mirror. In this mirror those two, still in the parlor, were perfectly reflected.

What happened took less time than I shall occupy in describing it; but I saw it all in the glass.

They stood face to face. He reached forth his hand; she took it in a listless way, dropping it immediately.

He half-turned to go. Then he stopped, faced her again, and placed a hand on her shoulder to draw her to him. She turned her face from him. I saw that face. It expressed impatience—I had almost said disgust.

And I saw *his* face. A black frown darkened it. I heard his muttered imprecation, and then his footsteps behind me.

But when I looked from the glass to the man I saw him bland and smiling as ever!

He twirled his neatly-cased umbrella as he descended the front steps and waved his hand to his wife.

"Farewell, Georgia," was his blithe salutation. "I shall stop at the Hotel Kremlin; remember that, if you should have occasion to write or telegraph. Expect me back a week from to-day."

I suppose that she thought any further pretense before me unnecessary. She vanished in the house without a word.

Colonel Gorman strode down the wide walk, switching off the heads of some early flowers along the borders. I followed him closely, but observed that he was plunged in reflection and paid no attention to me. Out of the grounds we passed in this way, and down the long elm-shaded street which the great house terminated. Thus we walked, he apparently forgetting my presence. I might have left him quietly, without his observing my departure; but I thought it better not to do so.

Arriving at a cross-street which led to my place of business, I stopped, while he strode on. I called to him twice before his attention was arrested.

"Ah!" he said, pausing and looking around. "What is it?"

"Only that I must bid you good-day here. A pleasant journey, and all success to you."

He removed his hat and dashed his hand over his brow.

"Wait!" he said. "Are you very busy this morning?"

"I have enough to occupy me."

"Give me an hour of your time. I must talk more with you. The train is likely to be later than reported."

Not only was his manner imperative, but my curiosity and interest were painfully excited. I accompanied him to the station.

CHAPTER VI.

A WHITED SEPULCHER.

A MAN MAY have acted without intentional wrong motives; he may even say that he could not have done otherwise, under all the circumstances, and yet he may be profoundly dissatisfied with his conduct. It was in this frame of mind that I continued my walk with Ellard Gorman toward the station.

My brief visit at his home had afforded me the most surprising glimpses of a domestic discord greater than my cousin Julia could have imagined. The truth had faintly appeared in his own guarded but significant utterances; and his wife, when alone with me, had astounded me with the fullness of her passionate protest against her situation and its resulting misery. As she was careful to explain to me, when the tempest had somewhat subsided, she had been suddenly overcome by a sense of her husband's cruelty in reminding her of days when she was happy, and in putting me in her way. The things that she had said to me, the confession she had made, were most unusual; but I could understand how *she* could be hurried to speak in this surprising way.

And she had promptly corrected the fault, if fault

it was; she had checked the assurances of my old love, she had bidden me renounce hope, and had peremptorily closed any further reference to the subject. How could I blame myself? The words I had spoken to her were natural, indeed unavoidable, under the circumstances. Why should I feel dissatisfied with myself?

It was merely, I suppose, that no man of honor and correct principles can enter his friend's house and engage in such a passage with the wife of that friend as had occurred between Mrs. Gorman and myself without experiencing something like self-reproach. I knew that our whole American social fabric—our Government itself—is builded upon the idea of the sacredness of the home, and that he who seeks to violate that temple is an unspeakable villain. Not that I was in any danger of becoming such a transgressor; that thought was rather absurd, considering the high character of Georgia Gorman, as well as my own rectitude. Still, an awkward consciousness that there was now something between me and the man by whose side I was walking which was unexplained and unexplainable made me uneasy. But was it unexplainable?

His conduct that morning had impressed me strangely. He had just requested me to accompany him farther, avowing that he wished to talk with me. Our business was concluded. What could he want to say?

Putting what I had seen and heard that morning together, I believed that a strange disclosure was preparing for me.

I was not mistaken.

But Mr. Gorman seemed in no haste to reach it, whatever it might be. He spoke of the fine weather, the natural beauty of the site of Montville, and the magnificent prospect from the high grounds of the city, which we were descending. He stopped and chatted briefly with an acquaintance whom we met. Arrived at the station, he purchased a ticket, attended to the checking of his baggage, and then went into the telegraph office to inquire for the train.

"They say it will not reach here for an hour yet," he said. "That is fortunate. I shall have time to say all I wish to. Come over here, and let us take it easy."

He led the way across the tracks to a green strip bordering the fence opposite. He cast himself lazily down, lighted a cigar, and said, with the utmost coolness:

"Well, Hunt, did you and madam reach a good understanding?"

Such remarkable surprises had been given me during the morning that I was in a measure prepared for anything that might transpire as to this man and wife, so the question did not greatly agitate me. Yet I could not suppress a certain feeling of guilt, and I presume the blood came to my cheek. I hesitated for an answer.

"Don't feel embarrassed, my boy," said the Colonel, with a pleasant familiarity. "I have the right to infer that during the fifteen or more minutes you and Mrs. Gorman were left together—

designedly left together, as I might just as well admit—she told you much that you did not know before, and rather rudely opened your eyes to the real state of things in that house. Did she?"

"Mr. Gorman, will you please answer me one question truthfully and candidly?"

"A hundred, if you wish." He was all composure and ease, talking without the slightest heat or impatience, and occasionally blowing the cigar-smoke through his nose to emphasize his languid amiability. "Ask me anything you wish, and I'll answer. I want nothing so much as a very free conversation with you."

"Pardon me, then—but I don't quite understand your present attitude toward me. Are you seeking my confidence in a friendly spirit? May I be sure that we shall end this interview without your becoming my deadly enemy?"

He laughed—yes, he actually laughed, very heartily. My serious face increased his amusement.

"My dear Hunt," he said, "I have known and esteemed you for some years. I assure you that there isn't a creature on this continent toward whom I feel more friendly at this moment than toward you. Nothing that you can tell me will surprise me half as much as what I shall say will surprise you. The extent of my knowledge as to the workings of your heart and the wreck of your affections is astonishing. I am not merely friendly to you; if I had any pity to spare from my own miserable self I would give it to you. No, sir; dismiss your apprehensions. I do not come to you as an 'injured husband;'

I have no concealed pistols or daggers. The folly in this case is not to be cured with blood, but the point has been reached in the situation where plain talk is demanded. If we can be made to understand each other thoroughly, some future trouble may be avoided, possibly some future happiness expected. So I repeat my question—did madam and yourself arrive at a fair understanding?"

"I will admit that there was a very plain talk between us. She expressed herself freely, and I did the same. But there was no impropriety; there was no ——"

He interrupted me with mirth that was almost boisterous. He clapped my knee with his hand.

"Impropriety! Who said there was, you sweet innocent? Who hinted at such a thing? Let Mrs. G. alone for attending to the proprieties; I'd risk *her* on any occasion. Now, not having heard a word that passed between you two, I will venture to guess correctly what madam said. What *you* said I can't be so sure of; I'm in doubt whether you'd venture to make love to her on small provocation or not; but *I'll* venture an elephant against an earring that Georgia denounced me severely for calling her down to see you, and took occasion to say that I was odious to her, and to throw in some edifying reflections about what might have been, but wasn't. Ah!—your face changes; she *did* say something like that? I know her thoroughly, Mr. Hunt; a fine woman, but subject to what are called 'tantrums' on provocation."

"I regret, now, that you insisted on my seeing

her. It was your suggestion, you will remember. I objected, as mildly as I might, but you would have it so."

Thus I spoke, and he swiftly answered:

"True enough. Perhaps she told you that she was not responsible for the repeated invitations to our parties and dinners that you have received; that I insisted on sending them. Maybe she informed you that she hated me all the more for trying to make her uncomfortable, if not positively wretched, with the presence of a rejected lover whom she has lately learned to compare favorably with her husband?"

I ran from hot to cold, and flushed and paled as I heard his words, truly stating what she had said.

"Mr. Gorman," I cried, "to what does all this tend? Are you accusing me?"

"No, indeed! I am only showing you that I thoroughly understand the situation."

There was a short pause. I knew not what to say. He was collecting and arranging his thoughts for an explanation.

"I suppose she is right about it," he began. "Knowing that she did not wish to see you, knowing why she did not, I ought to have respected her wishes. They were certainly very honorable to her. I suppose the insistence has been a mere manifestation of ugliness in me. Not the proper spirit, of course, for me to compel such a meeting, where she would have to treat you as an ordinary visitor and chide you for staying away; but it has grown out of the miseries and hatreds of our married life. So

thoroughly wretched have I been that I have been willing to make this woman, who is tied to me as the corpse was tied to the sailor battling with the waves—to make her feel all the wretchedness of the situation also. You start; you are thinking that such a course is unmanly—unworthy of me. Very true; so it is. But put yourself in my place, if you can; live the lie that I have lived for more than two years; be to the world smiling, happy, blest as man rarely is in his domestic relations; and be, in fact, the most miserable being that the sun shines on, staggering under the burden of a frightful error which he must conceal from the world, forever unable to seize upon a later enchanting happiness held out alluringly to him, only to be snatched away. Be all of this, Weldon Hunt, and then, perhaps, you will be able to look with pity and forbearance upon the shortcomings of a man in that situation."

As he spoke he roused himself to energy, almost to passion. He threw away his cigar; he rose and strode back and forth over the grass, his eyes sparkling, his cheeks flushing. Notwithstanding what I had heard before, his vehemence appalled me.

"Do you tell me that this has been *your* life here in Montville since you were married?" I asked. "Is the story all as bad as this?"

"Aye—and worse! I have told you that I have been a living lie; I must add that yonder fair mansion has been a whited sepulcher—beautiful outside; within, full of hatreds, discords and misery. You shall hear the story. Part of it has been given to

you, and the strange recital will interest you more than it could any other. I am much in the mood for unburdening myself to you to-day. I can trust to your discretion to keep the secret."

He poured it into my astonished ears.

CHAPTER VII.

A LIVING LIE.

COLONEL GORMAN consulted his watch. "We have still more than half an hour," he said. "I shall have time to be through with the story of all this wretched business if I speak fast, as I will. If you need any reason or provocation for my telling you, Mr. Hunt, beyond what has already been stated, I think the narrative will furnish it as it proceeds. Besides this, just reflect that I am about to absent myself from home for a week—in a perfectly legitimate way, to be sure, and upon business which is a sufficient excuse. But every day, as you know, the press reports bring us tidings of railway disasters involving the loss of life; and people sometimes go to New York and get mysteriously lost there—in fact, never turn up at all. Ah! your eyes suggest a question. Am I thinking of that latter possibility for myself? No, sir; emphatically not! I expect to return to Montville at the expiration of the week, and here resume my accustomed burdens, here put on the mask again, and semble and dissemble with the people. Yet no man can tell what a week or a day may bring forth; and you being interested in the facts next after Georgia and myself, I feel that I ought to improve the opportu-

nity to give you my version of them. Hers might differ; I care not. Should she ever have a chance to tell you her side of the case, you may judge between us. Should a kind and overruling Providence ever remove me from this rather weary world, and create that opportunity for Georgia, I trust that my spirit may attend the interview and be highly edified by her statement. She may talk then without interruption."

The man spoke and looked a sneer that was unnatural to him. His deeply-stirred feelings were leading him to exhibit to me a side of his character which his previous conversation had hinted at, but which was surprisingly new to me, as it would have been to any of his most intimate friends. Ellard Gorman a bitter cynic! It seemed impossible.

"Well, I proceed," he resumed; "but let us have a fair start. Of course, I knew—you knew that I knew—when I married Georgia Bard that she and you had but just finished up some kind of a love episode. All Montville was aware of that fact. The lady herself thought it necessary to refer to the subject during our courtship. 'Mr. Hunt is a very good kind of a man,' she said, 'and I am under obligation to him for many attentions; but you may judge for yourself, Colonel, whether *he* is the sort of person who was at any time likely to become *my* husband.'"

"Stay!" I cried. My heart swelled with the pain of remembrance, and I was angry at the seeming brutality of this revelation. "Do not say such things! It is not just to her, not merciful to me."

"Pray keep cool, Mr. Hunt! I set out to astonish you, and I can't stop at a trifle. Having told you what she said of you in the rosy days of our betrothal, I will presently let you know how she felt about you a short time after marriage.

"My friend, I shall be severely practical in the next ten minutes. I know what your feeling toward Georgia was in those days—is now, I presume. You thought—you still think—that there never was, never can be a woman like her. You have looked upon her as something better and higher than others of her sex. Yes, it was the old story! The man enraptured, the woman indifferent. Well, things are badly arranged in this curious world. You ought to have married her. From the bottom of my soul I wish you had!"

"Is it kind for you to torment me in this way?" I protested. "*You* stood in the way; *you* made it impossible for me to gain the happiness I craved; and now ——"

"Softly, my dear sir! I haven't time to argue the question; I shall be content to state the facts. The truth is, *I* did not stand very much in your way. I never had those exalted sentiments toward the lady that you had. Did you ever hear of a wooing in which quite half of it was done by the woman? Well, ours was of that kind."

"Colonel Gorman, this is simply monstrous!"

"No, it is the cold fact. You can understand, after that statement, what a weapon was in my hands when our differences began, as they did the same winter we were married. When madam would

almost go off into hysterics at the thought that she was chained to me for life, I was accustomed to retort, in the coolest fashion, '*You* certainly ought to be able to bear it, my dear; it is a condition of things which is largely of your own creation.'"

"Poor, unhappy Georgia!" broke impulsively from my lips.

"Yes, you are right in pitying her; we both deserve pity for the terrible position in which our mutual folly has placed us. In all my grief and anger under the odious galling of my chains I never have failed to see that she suffered as severely as I did. And she has had my sympathy—unexpressed, of course; it has been a long day since a kind or generous word has passed between us.

"Now let me go back to the time of my marriage. You remember what preceded it. I had returned from the war, covered with glory; the people were in a frenzy of admiration for the soldiers. That was natural enough; everywhere, at all times, military service has drawn the popular applause; the man in uniform has been the little hero. It was the same at the South, of course; our late enemies, now, fortunately, our brethren, made everything of the home-returning soldiers in gray, and the smiles of the Southern ladies were for none others.

"I need not tell you how it was. There was a species of glamour in that time—a kind of intoxication in the air. Everything went at high-pressure; even the emotions of the heart were stimulated, and men and women fell in love—or thought they did—on small provocation. So it happened that the

woman whom you were ready to go crazy over, and I, became the victims of this fevered state of feeling and of our own short-sighted folly. We were married.

"Yes, we two—Ellard Gorman and Georgia Bard—as unthinkingly as two children in the heyday of a frolic, stood up before many gratified witnesses, took each other for better, for worse, and promised to love and honor till death!

"My God, sir, think of it! Think how that holy ordinance is profaned every day by just such rashness! Look around you and witness the domestic hells that are created by men and women rushing headlong into those sweet and tender relations that were designed to create a heaven upon earth, instead of approaching them carefully, reverently, and with the full confidence of undying love!

"Well, Mr. Hunt, for our awful blunder let me take my full share of the blame. Let me not imitate the cowardice of our first parent and say 'It was the woman,' for I was a man well out of the foolishness of boyhood, with a man's experience and knowledge of the world. I ought not to have mistaken my feelings, even if she did hers.

"What did I know about her? Merely that she had a bright, handsome face, a graceful form, a ready and winning tongue, and that she was filled with admiration for me, as all the women were. I suppose my vanity was flattered by the marked preference of the woman who was generally admitted to be the belle of Montville. Yes, that probably lies at the root of my gigantic error. In the

great evening-up and just assignment of censure and praise, I think it will turn out that the quickening of male vanity has made more fools on this planet than any other single cause.

"Did I ever stop to ask myself whether Georgia Bard was calculated by nature, or even education, to be a fitting companion to me all through life, and down to the grave? Whether she could satisfy that hunger of the man's heart which is sure to arise after marriage, if it does not before? Not once! She played brilliantly, she sung divinely (by Jove, sir, it's a long time *now* since I've heard any music from her, I promise you), she was an excellent horsewoman, she conversed like a philosopher in petticoats, and she admired *me*. I was the only man in Montville who could win her. Not a very stable foundation was this, you'll agree, on which to build hopes of wedded bliss, but there was nothing stronger. Ours was the common error.

"On her part, what did she know of me? Why, she saw me riding through the town, with silver eagles on my shoulders and my arm in a sling, at the head of my battalion of veterans; she heard the cheers, and fluttered her handkerchief with the others. On closer acquaintance, she found that I was a good-looking fellow—why shouldn't I say it?—already quite well off, with first-rate prospects for the future, and much desired by the girls of Montville. I suppose she did not, as I did not, submit to the serious self-examination that every man, every woman ought to make, before entering upon matrimony."

"I believe you do her injustice," was my interruption. "Before you came back from the war she talked with me in the most sedate and thoughtful way upon this very subject. In so many words she said to me: 'Did you ever think how serious a thing it is for a man and a woman to take each other for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to live together after God's holy ordinance till death does them part?' And when she finally and kindly said me Nay she told me *this*, as positively as a woman could say it: 'I tell you, after seeing and knowing Ellard Gorman I can never love another man! No, not if my years should be prolonged to thousands.'"

My voice grew husky and tremulous at the recollection. He nervously pulled at his mustache.

"Poor woman!" he said; "she sadly mistook herself and me. But I must go on rapidly with the story. Mr. Hunt, I tell you there's nothing like the estate of matrimony to exhibit a man and a woman to each other as they really are! No room, no chance, *then*, for concealment or artifice; the real person comes out strongly in vivid colors. If it be, as we are told, that the utmost forbearance and considera tion are needed between those whom God has really joined, what must be the condition of those who awake after marriage to the conviction that there can never be love between them!

"Before the snows of the winter of 1863–'64 had vanished that awakening came to Georgia and I.

"Why was it?—how was it? How can I explain, only that the experience of those months

convinced us both of our error. We were an ill-assorted pair. We had nothing in common but the fact that we were husband and wife. The knowledge came quickly and bluntly. Well, you've heard of such things in romance. Good God, I wish it were romance that I am telling, instead of woful truth! I have read, and you have, of men and women in this situation who have patiently and conscientiously tried to develop love, and have succeeded, in a measure. Oh, what bosh! What stuff the novelists of to-day do give us! Love—the real article—is too high and too holy a thing to be manufactured as they make the pipe that we are going to use in our sewers. It comes itself, of its own accord, or it don't come at all. You can't whistle it to you, as if it were a poodle, and it won't be coerced. You might as well try to imprison a rainbow and keep it on exhibition under a glass case in your parlor."

"Yet," I interrupted, "you two have lived together all this time with every appearance of happiness. How have you been able to keep up such a monstrous deceit? Why, Georgia herself—poor woman!—before you left us together this morning, gently reproved *me* for not coming to your house, urging me to come in future; and no stranger could have suspected from the talk of both of you that there was anything but the most perfect happiness between you."

"Ah, yes! Such has been my management. In the Living Lie that we have illustrated I have always been the prime liar. Georgia has rather reluctantly followed my lead, because I have convinced her that

my way was best. Intending to spare nothing in this confession, Mr. Hunt, I must speak of the explosion that occurred between us in the spring of 1864. Circumstances had been tending rapidly toward a full explanation in words, and it came when I found Georgia in tears in her chamber.

"'What is the matter?' I asked, realizing that a crisis was at hand.

"'I am the most wretched of women,' she answered, with a small tempest of sobs and sighs.

"'*I*, certainly, am not the happiest of men,' was my rejoinder.

"'I don't believe you ever loved me!' she almost screamed.

"'My dear Georgia, don't excite yourself! Give me credit for doing the best I could. As for love—there's been none of it lost between us. Have you any claims to make on that score?'

"'I might have married a man I *did* love—a man who loved me!' she said, getting hysterical and shedding a new flood of tears.

"'I believe that is so; and most cordially do I regret that you did not marry the other man. But now, Mrs. Gorman, since we have at last reached an understanding, I propose that we make the best of the situation, and calmly consult about what ought to be done.'

"'There is only one thing to be done,' she said, drying her tears. 'I will be a party to this wretched deceit no longer. I cannot remain bound to *you* all my life. We must separate.'

"'You are no doubt thinking of Chicago and the

easy laws that prevail there on the subject of divorce. Eh, Georgia?'

"Her silence admitted it.

"'Well, then, I'll tell you that I want nothing of the kind for myself or for you. I want to convince you that it will be far better for both of us to live right on, as though appearances were real, put a brave face on the hard situation, and make the best of it.'

"She wrung her hands in agony. 'Oh, why do you insist on such a life of torment for me?' she sobbed. 'I can't—I won't endure it.'

"'There are the best of reasons why. Since we have discovered that we cannot love each other, we should exercise common sense and good judgment as to our future relations. No doubt the Western divorce courts would kindly sunder our hateful bonds—it would be hard to find a marriage knot that they can't untie—and you would be at liberty to contract new relations. As for me—that latter part of it is of no consequence. I am perfectly satisfied with my first experiment in this line, and have no desire to repeat it. But I candidly tell you, Mrs. Gorman, that I cannot bear the scandal, the publicity, the disgrace of such a thing. I am a man of some consequence already in Montville, as you well know. Though still young in years, I am in the sure way of prosperity; fortune is smiling upon me, and I believe that a large career is opening before me. I expect to become a considerable figure in the politics of this city and county; yes, even of the State. Nothing hurts such prospects so much as domestic scandal. Say what you will, a man can't attain the

highest success who has parted with his wife. The public are swift to put him in fault, whether he ought to be or not. You see, therefore, Georgia, why I cannot afford, upon my own account, to part with you.'

"Thus I spoke. She heard me with a hard, cold face, and replied, with a sneer:

"'You are a chivalrous man, Colonel Gorman. Everything must bend to your own selfish advantage. I am to be cursed with your odious society all my life for your own personal advantage. You are capable of ——'

"'Wait!' I interrupted. 'You have looked upon only one-half the picture. You, woman as you are, can afford no better than I can to sever our bonds. No wife, with no better cause than you have, ever did or ever can escape the odium of a divorce. It would cling to you all your life; society, barely tolerant of such a procedure, would find ways to make you feel its disapproval. The man you might be hardy enough to marry outside this State, thus escaping prosecution for bigamy here, would quickly come to feel that he had made a terrible mistake. His love for you might end in loathing; it would be of strong fiber if it did not. I tell you, Georgia, it is an awful thing for a woman to have two living husbands!'

"Ah, Mr. Hunt, you shudder at the picture! So did she. I had touched her conscience, her self-interest as well; she had seen enough of society to recognize the truth of what I said. Still, she could not agree to my view all at once.

"'The alternative is a dreadful one,' she said. 'What hope can I have in deliberately living a lie and making a sacrifice of myself for appearances?'

"'The sacrifice, madam, is one that society and our own interest demand of us. Don't suppose for an instant that we shall be the only couple who deliberately and wisely make the best of the worst blunder that man and woman can make. I could point out to you several such cases, right here in our little city, that I more than suspect; not so conspicuous as ours, but still of high enough position to create quite a shock, in case of an open rupture. We see and hear a great deal of domestic discord; but, I assure you, there is a vast amount of it that exists generally unsuspected. And this is the wiser way. Neither prussic acid, 'wildcat' divorce, nor open abandonment ever cured such ills as you and I are enduring. The real remedy is *to endure* them; put on a smiling face, and never let the world know that you are a positive social failure. You speak of hope: well, there is one that may always be with you. Campbell does not enumerate it in his 'Pleasures,' I believe; but he did not undertake to deal with this phase of modern society. There is always a fair prospect that such a hearty, robust fellow as I will go off with a snap. The strong men always die suddenly. Try to live in view of such a desirable dispensation, Mrs. Gorman, and your condition may be more tolerable than you think. And now that I have clearly outlined your duty and policy, as well as mine, allow me to ask what you think of my advice?'

"She made no reply; she left the room abruptly,

as though she could bear no more. But as the weeks passed I perceived that she was practically acquiescing in my opinion. I need give you no more of these details; you know what has occurred. We have presented a beautiful picture of domestic happiness to the world; we have in fact been as much estranged as though the poles of the earth divided us."

He paused and looked inquiringly at me. My heart swelled painfully within me. At once I was regretful and glad.

"What do you think of it all?" he asked.

"Your question is a painful one for *me* to answer," I replied. "I will not try to answer it. One thing I do say: if your way has been the best, your position has been very different from hers. It was easy for *you*, who, as you admit, have not known what love was, to coolly recommend such a hypocritical course to her with the bitter brutality that you seem to have put into your language. As usual, the woman has borne the burden. She has had the double sorrow; you, merely the wearing of a distasteful yoke."

"Your opinion would be quite correct, Mr. Hunt, had my statement given you all the facts. It is true enough that upon what you have heard you might call my advice selfish, my conduct cruel. Well, sir, I have for a year past had my own medicine put continually to my lips. Retributive justice overtook me and made me suffer all that Georgia has. It came a year ago with your cousin, Julia Bement."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW TANTALUS.

A NEW light broke upon me upon hearing his words.

"My cousin Julia!" I echoed. "What am I to understand by your mention of *her* name after what you have told me? What had *she* to do with your domestic unhappiness? Colonel Gorman, I refuse to enter upon any conjectures or guesses as to your meaning. Please explain it; my relationship to the lady gives me the right to demand it."

His face grew heavy and somber.

"The real cause of her leaving Montville lately has not transpired, I believe?"

"No, it has not. But, as you must be aware, her leaving has been a matter of general surprise. She was a popular favorite, was pleased with her situation, and gave complete satisfaction."

"She did not tell you her reason for leaving here?"

"No. She distinctly refused to tell me, any further than that she was acting from a whim."

The strong man became violently agitated. Something like a tremor shook him, and he controlled his emotion with difficulty.

"She kept her secret, of course," he said. "I am not satisfied with myself for revealing it to you

now. But one disclosure has followed another, beginning almost by accident. I surely may trust to your discretion when I seek the poor relief of thus unburdening myself, and I have an object in so doing which you shall soon learn. Mr. Hunt, I tell you that others are bearing a heavy cross beside Georgia and yourself and me. The noble, perfect creature I have named bears one. Her life has been clouded by the effect of that delusion which caused me to wed Georgia Bard. She abruptly left this people because she could not in honor remain here longer. In other words, she fled from *me*."

I listened with such an amazement as had not been mine in all his previous confession, waiting eagerly for him to go on.

"I have made you understand, I think," he continued, "that it was not difficult for *me* to play the part that I recommended to Georgia on the occasion of our free explanation. I was disappointed in her—that was all. I knew there could never be anything like a union of hearts or souls between us two, and I resolved to put up with the disappointment and make the best of it. I had no other passion to contend with; there was no other woman's face to waylay me in my hours of weakness and despondence and overcome my resolution. The beautiful women of Montville, married and unmarried, I admired in just the sense that men of heart and principle will everywhere admire the sex—temperately, chastely and chivalrously. I can truly affirm that before Julia Bement came to vex what peace I had, I loved no woman. Following my

practical estrangement from Georgia, I had turned with renewed zeal to business and to politics, and was finding compensation in their contests and excitements.

"And then—she came.

"My secret, and hers, as you are a witness, never escaped us; it was religiously guarded; even Georgia never had suspected it, when, in my bitterness of heart, my almost madness, I avowed it to her. I had put a rigid sentry on guard over my eyes, my speech, my acts; for the year past I have labored under a self-discipline to which few men in my situation would submit.

"But it was all over with me from the first moment that I met her, saw her, heard her voice. Ah, Hunt, *there* is a woman for whom a man might be happy to die; to live with whom would be bliss itself!

"I met her frequently on my visits to the school as one of the Board; at my house, where she came in the way that all the best people of Montville came. I was not long in satisfying myself that her quick intelligence and perception had pierced the sham which Georgia and I were showing to the world, and that she perfectly understood what kind of relations existed between us. She made no remark upon the discovery; politeness forbade that; but I saw it sufficiently in her face.

"Well, sir, I struggled long and hard against this new passion. It was a hopeless struggle from the first; but I desperately kept it up. I tried to practice for myself the philosophy that I had so calmly

commended to Georgia, and I failed. Yes, Hunt, let me make my wretched confession full; as the months went on, the frenzy of this secretly cherished love brought me to the very brink of the precipice. I became willing, for her sake, in possessing her, to sacrifice everything that I had held dear and had suffered to retain — honor, position, prospects, wealth; all, all, if she would fly with me. Was I insane, for the time, to wish to throw away everything that I had cherished to enjoy such an illicit love? I do not know; other men, as well balanced as I, have allowed themselves to be drawn into the same frightful vortex and hurried to their destruction. It is charitable, perhaps, to call it temporary madness."

"Ah!" I interrupted him, with exultation, "but you counted vainly when you addressed *that* woman in such a way! She taught you a lesson, I'll be bound."

"You shall hear. I sought her—no matter where —I secured an interview with her in such a way that there was absolute privacy, without danger of suspicion. Then I poured out my whole heart to her. I told her everything—my fatal mistake in my marriage; the domestic torment that I was enduring, that Georgia was enduring; the hypocrisy of our lives before the world, which my soul was loathing; my love for herself, which would last with life and beyond it. Ah, Hunt, my dear fellow, I never talked as I did in that hour! I implored her to rescue me from the daily degradation and reproach of my acted lie. I argued to her, plausibly

enough, as you may concede, that it would be better even for Georgia if, by my flight and abandonment of her, I should break her weary chains and allow her to secure legal freedom from me."

He paused, rather overcome by the remembrance of that interview.

"And her answer?" I eagerly demanded.

"Yes—wait. Such a woman! I watched her face while I was pleading with her; though a trifle pale, it expressed neither anger nor surprise. At this point of my appeal, seeing that I faltered with eagerness and the stress of my passion, she spoke.

"'Go on,' she said; 'I hear you. I permit you to speak in this way to me, and I will tell you why presently. What further do you wish to say?'

"Hardly knowing whether to be encouraged or chilled by such a reception, I rapidly told her the rest. Of course I repeated that everything in Montville must be given up for her; in fact I must make an exile of myself in cleaving to her; but that I was ready and eager to do. Also, the larger part of my estate must be given up; I would leave it for Georgia. Not only necessity but justice demanded that this be so. Yet I should be able to provide amply for the future of Julia and myself. I had abundance of ready money, and valuable securities—the bonds of the United States and our best railroad corporations—on which I could easily realize a hundred thousand dollars in New York in two hours. Our flight should be carefully arranged, so as to put previous suspicion and detention at fault. This day was Tuesday; on the following Thursday, at night,

we would leave town in a livery-conveyance, travel half the night, take the railroad at a station twenty-five miles below, reach New York on Friday, and on the next day take a steamship for Liverpool.* Arrived in the Old World, our life should be just what she might desire. We would seek seclusion and privacy somewhere in France, Italy, or even Egypt, and in the realization of our love would forget everything but ourselves.

"Such was my plan, urged upon her with glowing and vehement ardor. I sought to take her hand; she repulsed me. How can I tell you how stern her superb face looked—and yet, what pity dwelt in those regal eyes!

"'Colonel Gorman,' she calmly said, 'I think you are a coward!'

"I began to protest my surprise at her language. She abruptly stopped me.

"'I knew much of what you have said months ago,' she continued. 'I am not dull; what I did not know for a certainty I have easily guessed. The truth as to your relations with your wife I was at no loss to discover; that you admired me—even loved me, as you should not—I have understood. You have been discreet and careful, but your eyes and your manner have spoken out to me long before to-day. Colonel Gorman, you are a man! You are strong in all the things in which men ought to be strong—or at least you have been so. You have jealously guarded your good name and your stand-

*The reader need hardly to be reminded that the Atlantic cable was not in successful operation till July 27, 1866, which fact should be taken into account in calculating the probable success of this scheme.

ing in this community; you have been so severe and cautious in doing it that you have insisted upon that poor woman, your wedded wife, suffering in silence with you; and she, certainly, ought not to share more than half the blame of your present misery, as I know it. All this I have seen and understood. I have secretly admired you for your brave reticence and self-control. I hoped it would continue—I trusted it would—to the end of my year. That will be only three weeks from now. I had resolved to leave Montville then, and to remove with my absence the object of your disturbance.'

"Her steady voice faltered a little; she stopped, with an emotion that her face scarcely showed, but which I perfectly understood. I rushed to her; my arms were about her waist; I kissed her lips and murmured in her ear vows of eternal fidelity, hopes of an earth-long happiness.

"Seeming at first to yield, she quickly wrested herself from my embrace. She fled from my arms; her face expressed horror; her hands were outstretched to repulse me.

"'Oh, Julia!' I pleaded. 'Why are you so cruel to me? You admit that you admired me; you mean that you loved me. Confess it, now; consent to what I urge, and we shall be happy together.'

"Her dark cheek flushed; her hands were clinched; I looked upon her glorious presence—ah, Heaven! such a woman as was never before sent on earth!—and I could not but see that she was then and there fighting out the stern battle between love and duty.

"'Yes, I have loved you; I love you now!' she answered. 'You force me to the confession, and therein I say you are cowardly! Think of your duty and mine! Is not yours the larger of the two? If I could be capable of yielding to your base proposal, could I shame any one but myself? My cousin, perhaps, of distant kin; he is all. But you—think of it! You would give up not alone your duty to your wife—and such she is, whether you love her or not—but your duty to yourself, to this people, to your honor and fame. All this you would yield for a guilty love of me!'

"'Yes,' I cried, 'all that, and more. I would give up everything for the possession of your love; all that earth has, all that heaven can promise.'

"Her face was still resolute and fixed, but a despairing smile struggled through.

"'Then,' she said, 'you must take that way alone. I cannot walk it with you. I would not if I could. I have heard all you had to say; now let this interview close. Ellard Gorman, I pity you; my love must be withheld. At the close of my year I shall leave Montville; you will know the real reason. Give me your hand; seek me no more, or you will hasten my flight. Let us trust that we shall meet in a happier world, where joy instead of bitterness will be dealt out to God's suffering children.'

"Her luminous eyes glistened with tears, and her face was turned from us. I tried to take new hope from her countenance; again I sought to embrace her, and again I was repulsed. My soul went out in a last despairing cry to her; unconsciously, I used

in part the words that Georgia had uttered in her frantic appeal two years before.

"'Oh, Julia, pray think of what I have said before you thus send me away to despair! I have offered you happiness; why can you not take it? What hope can I have in this life without you?'

"She stood before me, grand, magnificent in her regal presence, her beautiful face eloquent with the sentiments that she expressed.

"'What hope? The Christian's hope! You suffer; she, your wretched wife, suffers; and in the affection with which you have inspired me against my will, I, too, must suffer to the end. Well, what of that? We were all made to mourn; if a cross is given us, let us each carry it bravely, patiently. So I will; so must you; so must we all. These are the precepts that I learned at my mother's knee; a merciful Saviour does not permit me to forget them. This is your way and mine. Farewell! Do not seek me in private again; you will only hasten my departure. If you pray, beseech God that we meet in another and happier world.'

"She offered me her cheek; I clasped her in my arms and kissed her lips. She shrunk, fainting, from me; and I fled from that apartment, knowing that peace could never visit my heart again on earth."

CHAPTER IX.

A BRIEF FAREWELL.

HE PAUSED. He drew his hat down moodily over his eyes; he turned his face from me as he sat there on the grass and seemed lost in sad introspection.

For ten miles west of the Montville station the railway runs in a straight course, and there is little wood or other obstruction between. Looking that way now, in the pause that came upon me as well as him—for my thoughts struggled tumultuously and confusedly for utterance after what I had heard—I saw a faint feather of smoke rising above the little skirt of trees down the track. I called his attention to it.

"Yes, that's the train," he replied. "I'm glad I've had time to say all I wished to say to you. Come along. Is there anything you have to suggest? Speak quick if there is; my time is short, and I have a little more to add."

"Have you told me all that there is to tell about my cousin?"

"Yes; what more could there be? I did not see her again after that crushing interview; I dared not seek her; she left Montville three weeks later, as you know, and with her went out all the light and cheer of this sorrowful world."

"Do you write to her?"

"I don't even know where she has gone. If you know you had better not tell me; the temptation to do something weak and useless had better be kept from me."

He gave me his hand. My feelings broke out beyond control.

"To what end have you told me all this?" I cried. "Why was it necessary to rake out the buried fires of my unfortunate love? You have succeeded in making me more miserable than I expected ever to be again. And Julia—why could you not have kept *that* wretched secret? Why burden me with it?"

"Hunt, this is a world of change. No to-morrow is like to-day; change is the law of our being; death is busy all around us. I may go first; I am most likely to. Should that happen, I want you to send my dying message to your cousin. I'll write it out, seal it up and deliver it to you in trust when I return from New York. I executed my will some time ago, giving everything to Georgia, as is her right; and I've made you co-executor with her. Should anything happen to me, remember that it is to be found in the inner chamber of my safe. And I want to make a written request to Georgia, on a separate paper—so it needn't be made public, you know—a request that she provide liberally for Julia out of her great abundance. This shall be seen to later. It strikes me, Hunt, that there's great propriety in making you co-executor, for you'll undoubtedly be my successor at Gorman place."

"How can you trifle so?" I remonstrated.

"It is no trifling. You may be a happy man before the buds of two more springs have blossomed. But should it be otherwise; if we four are fated to live on in weariness and misery to old age, cursed by the error of Georgia and myself, then ——"

He paused and looked deliberately into my agitated face.

"Well? What then?"

"Hunt, women always bear such things better than men. They smile while the iron is entering their souls. You and I can at least be *men*. Any weak fool that bears the semblance of a man can give up, break down, and run away from the miseries of life; it takes a *man* to face them. Let us be brave, my friend, and leave the rest to God."

He gave me a strong grip with his sinewy hand. We crossed the tracks again to the platform; a dozen men gathered about the Mayor to take him by the hand, to wish him a pleasant journey and a safe return. He had a smile and a kind word for each; no man could have guessed, from his buoyant manner and sunny aspect, that his heart within him was bowed down with hopeless grief. The train thundered in; there was the usual stir and bustle of arriving and departing passengers, the changing of baggage, and the cries of hackmen and hotel-runners; then the shriek of escaping steam ceased, the bell rung, and with the conductor's "All aboard!" the train swept away. Ellard Gorman stood on a car-platform, waved his hand, and called to me

"Good-by, Hunt, till next week!" His tall, erect figure and smiling face vanished; and, as in the most serious moments trifles are noted, I happened to observe how plainly his smile showed the elaborate gold-filling of his front upper teeth.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT THE LIGHTNING BROUGHT.

I WALKED back to my store, shut myself up in the office in the rear of it, and tried to think about the occurrences of the last two hours.

I lingered for awhile over my meeting and conversation with Mrs. Gorman; but I had no trouble to understand *her*. Gratifying to my pride, sadly consoling to my bruised heart as was the discovery that her life with her husband had filled her with poignant regret that she had preferred him to me, yet I did not mistake her. She had appealed to my honor to keep that hasty and incautious disclosure buried in my breast; I had sworn to do so. She had bade me never seek her, remembering honor and duty above all; she had sternly denied me hope in this world; as, indeed, how could she do otherwise? The virtue of good women redeems a fallen race from utter badness; and even in the severest pangs of my grief, as I regarded the woman I loved, who still loved me, as placed for all time beyond my reach—still, my finer feelings were touched by the lofty reply that Georgia had given me, that Julia had given Ellard Gorman. My conscience was aroused and awakened; my inmost soul cried out, "It is well!"

But as for the Colonel—what was I to think of his confession, his advice, his stern philosophy and noble resolves for the future?

In all my business dealings with him, which had been many; in all our personal intercourse, I had found him the embodiment of truth. Candor and frankness had characterized every word and act.

What reason had I to doubt his sincerity now?

I reviewed our long conversation, and was forced to admit that there was no apparent reason. Never did truth appear so plainly upon the surface of a confession. His emotion at certain points in it was of the kind that could not be simulated. He had not spared himself in self-condemnation; that bitterest of all judgment he had administered with unsparing tongue. His motives for laying bare his soul to me had been plainly stated, and were sufficient to justify the act. Whence, then, was my doubt?

Is the wish ever father to the thought, among striving, dissatisfied men? Did the sudden suspicion which Colonel Gorman saw unspoken in my eyes, and promptly repudiated—the suspicion that he was leaving Montville forever—did it now haunt my mind because I wished that it might be true?

Think as I might, reflect as I would upon all I had heard, my thoughts traversed a circle which regularly brought me to the idea—perhaps he never will come back.

Vexed at myself for adhering so closely to this suspicion in the face of the strong facts that made it seem idle and unjust, I quitted the store and went over to the hotel to dinner. Across the table from

me sat several of the business young men of the town, and their talk soon drifted to the person who was just then occupying my thoughts.

"I saw you at the station this morning, Mr. Hunt," said one of them. "Went over to wish the Mayor *bon voyage*, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well, I was glad to see so many there on the same errand."

"So was I," said another. "Attentions to such a man as that are well placed."

"A great credit to our city, sir," remarked number three. "But I predict that his field of usefulness will soon be widened."

"That it will! Colonel Gorman is certain of the nomination and election to Congress this fall."

"He won't stop there, either. The State has high honors in store for him within the next ten years."

Thus they talked, without a dissenting voice, as to his merit and his brilliant prospects. And I knew that what they expressed was a fair sample of the opinions of Montville.

This day was Wednesday. Somewhat mechanically I went the round of the week's duties, retaining sufficient presence of mind to attend to my business and direct my clerks, while abstraction and heaviness ruled me. Once Mrs. Gorman, riding in her carriage, met me. I raised my hat; spite of my promise and my resolution I longed for her to stop, that I might again talk with her, face to face; but she bowed coldly and passed on.

Sunday came. I was at church, as usual; the

most fashionable place of worship in our city. Looking over to the Gorman pew, I saw that it was vacant, which was unusual.

The man who attends a place of worship after indulging for days and nights in thoughts and imaginations that merely border on the sinful, will be apt to hear his accusation pronounced in the sacred edifice. It was so with me. The services went on in their accustomed way, I scarcely taking note of them, when the words uttered by the minister fell upon my ear—"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife!" The guilty blood flew to my face; I could have fancied the absurdity that all the congregation were looking at me.

Nor was this all. I heard the Bible story of the accusation of David read, and at the words "Thou art the man!" I cast down my eyes. Had my own name been spoken I could not have felt more directly accused.

The lesson was a tonic to my resolution. I mused all the remainder of the day upon the harassing situation, and grew calmer. "The antidote that has saved thousands of men from insanity or suicide can save you," I reflected. "Quit musing and maundering; go to work with a will; try hard, unflagging toil of mind." In this mood I began the week. Early and late, Monday and Tuesday, I was at desk and counter; steady occupation drove the demon of unrest and tantalizing suggestion from my brain, and I was enabled to enjoy two nights of unbroken rest and sleep.

Wednesday came round again; Colonel Gorman

would return this day. I had not heard directly from him, but a mutual friend told me of a letter he had received from him to that effect. In fact, the letter had been shown to me. It was written on the paper of the Hotel Kremlin, with a cut of that great building on the upper third of it; it bore date the previous Saturday, and was written in Gorman's well-known dashing characters. The body of it related entirely to some private business; a postscript added: "I shall reach home Wednesday, without fail."

I had no reason to dread his appearance, but the words haunted me all the morning. The old, unworthy wish was struggling again within me. Noon came, and one o'clock; I was not hungry, but feverish, and remained at my place of business. There the telegraph messenger found me; I tore open the envelope, and read:

Hotel Kremlin burned up last night. Colonel Gorman dead in the ruins. Break it to his wife.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE SHADOW.

THE PAPER dropped from my hand; my head fell upon my breast; I almost felt that this startling realization of the wicked wish against which I had struggled so long and sorely had made me a murderer in heart, if not in deed! I was faint and dizzy; I saw through the glass-door the counters, shelves and varied goods of my store, the clerks and the customers; but all were blended in a confused whirl. Just then Alvin Baker came in with a hurried step.

"I must have left the Mayor's letter with you," he said. "I can't find it, and—— But, good God, man, what's the matter with you? You're as white as a sheet, and you shake as if you had the palsy! What is it?"

I silently handed him the dispatch. He read it, and clutched the desk for support.

"Heavens!" he ejaculated. "This is dreadful! The Colonel dead? Why, it don't seem possible! In so frightful a way, too! What's to be done? Shall I give it to the afternoon paper—have the dispatch posted on the bulletin-board?"

"No," I replied. "His wife must be told, first. Will you—won't you go and tell her?"

"Not I! I've the slightest acquaintance with her,

You know her well; you must do it. Stay here; I'll order a carriage for you;" and he hurried away.

In ten minutes I was at Gorman place. The servant at the door took my card and ushered me into the same parlor where the previous interview had occurred. In a few moments she returned, saying that her mistress was indisposed and begged to be excused.

"Go back," was my abrupt command, "and say to her that I *will* see her. Tell her that I will take no refusal; that I shall stay here till she comes to me."

I waited full half an hour before I saw her. In the interim the servant once came into the parlor, with the excuse of arranging the furniture; but I well understood that she had been sent to see and report whether I still remained.

At last Georgia entered. My mind was agitated by my dreadful mission, yet I could not but observe how the pallor of her face was set off by the dark material of her wrapper, and how exquisitely beautiful was that suffering face. But now it bore a faint tinge of red, and her deep gray eyes had a warning glow as they met mine.

"Weldon," she said, firmly, "this is not manly of you. What madness possesses you? Foolish man! this conduct may bring me to hate you. I can add nothing to what I said the other day; I have come down now only to tell you so—not to hear a word from your lips. Go! I cannot, will not expose myself to ——"

She paused as I held up the dispatch; something

in my face also warned her. She took the paper, read it, and was sinking to the floor when I caught her in my arms. It was a dead swoon; she lay there perfectly unconscious, her lips slightly parted, her long lashes resting on her white cheeks.

I laid her on the sofa and rang the bell. Before the servant came I was tempted to press my lips to hers; but I successfully resisted the temptation; it seemed like sacrilege.

Restoratives were brought; with a deep sigh consciousness returned; the eyelids folded heavily back. She saw me, she saw the maid.

"You may go, Marie," she said.

Again we were alone. Her strength suddenly returned; she sat up and faced me.

"Is that all you know?" she whispered, holding up the dispatch, clutched in her fingers.

"That is all. I hurried to you on receiving it."

"Do you believe it?"

"I see no reason to doubt it."

Her head drooped; she seemed to sink; without remonstrance I placed my arm about her and held her up.

"It is sudden," she said. "It is terrible. I saw him last night in a dream. He was very pale."

And seeming to overlook my presence, she added, as one might soliloquize:

"He was sometimes kind; once I thought I loved him. May God forgive me; I refused his kiss when he went away!"

She shuddered and started from my arm. A flood of tears came to her relief.

"Georgia," I found voice to say, "regard me now only as a friend. Tell me what you wish, and it shall be done."

Her voice was steady again as she answered :

"Thank you, Weldon. You know what to do; what ought to be done. You were *his* friend; you will be just; you will be generous to his memory, as I will try to be. Relieve me of all the care you can, now. I am sorely stricken; conscience accuses me; I want to be alone. Will you do what should be done, in my name?"

I eagerly consented. I saw she was still faint and weak. I summoned the maid, and, leaning on her arm, Mrs. Gorman returned to her chamber.

She glanced over her shoulder as she left the room. The painfully-drawn face was lighted with a faint glow of gratitude; and even in that time of shock and sorrow I looked hopefully forward to the time to come.

CHAPTER XII.

OUT OF DARKNESS INTO LIGHT.

SHOCKED as I was by the news of the morning, agitated also by my brief interview with the newly-made widow, it was not in human nature—at least it was not in my nature—to confine my thoughts to the present questions of public loss and private bereavement which crowded close upon the announcement of Ellard Gorman's death. My imagination would reach forward through the months to come, continuously pointing to a happiness which but an hour before I had desperately deemed to be utterly beyond my reach. By these swelling emotions together I was, upon leaving the mansion, so disturbed and unmanned that I felt it unsafe for me to return immediately to the busy streets of the city. I wished it not to be observed that the stunning news had affected me more or differently than it did others who might be thought to stand quite as near to the deceased in later years as I had. I wanted no curious tongues set wagging over the question as to why I should be more affected than they. So I dismissed the carriage and took a wide circuit afoot, walking rapidly in the effort to calm my excitement. In an hour I had reached a low range of hills overlooking our city. I gazed at the fair prospect, the spires, the smoking chimneys

of the factories, the streets and dwellings, with the thronging signs of industry and busy life, and then thought of the foremost man of this thriving community. But a brief week before I had seen his springing step on the street, his smiling, manly face, and heard his hearty voice; over there at the station he had grasped my hands and waved me farewell, calling out cheerily, "Good-by, Hunt, until next week!" And now I was told that he was dead —buried under the black and smoking ruins of the great hotel in the metropolis. Merciful God, what a death—for such a man! I could not make it seem real.

I threw myself down upon the grass, clasped my hands over my eyes to shut out, if possible, *that* horrible, hideous vision; and presently, recalling all that he had said to me in those last moments that I saw him face to face, I was startled to note the prophecy that his language contained: "Hunt, this is a world of change. No to-morrow is like to-day; change is the law of our being; death is busy all around us. I may go first. I am most likely to." Much else that he had said in that hour plainly indicated to me now that something like a presentiment of approaching death was working in his mind. With this clearly seen, all possible doubt as to his motive in making so full a confession to me vanished. He had wished me to know all; anticipating a speedy end, regarding me only with friendship and kindness, he had thought it only just to me that I should know everything in order to make my way easier in becoming one day his successor as the

husband of Georgia. I started at the coarseness of the suggestion; and yet, why should it discompose me? It was exactly like *his* candor to have avowed it in so many words, had I pressed him upon the point; he had more than hinted such a thing.

The afternoon sun was declining while I lay there, thinking, struggling to calm myself in the overwhelming situation. Satisfied that I could now at least show myself in the streets without exciting remark as to my appearance and conduct, I rose and rapidly walked back to the city. As I struck the principal business street, I observed the unusual collection of men in knots upon the sidewalk; agitation and excitement were visible in most of the faces; before the bulletin-board outside a newspaper office two hundred were gathered. Elbowing my way through, I perceived that the board showed merely the bare fact that was contained in my dispatch. I went to the telegraph office and learned that nothing further had been received. I wrote a telegram for one of the clerks of the burned hotel, whose name was signed to my dispatch, asking further particulars, and the operator immediately began sending it. I was passing out when he spoke to me.

"You had better wait, Mr. Hunt. I learn from New York that the person to whom this is addressed is now in their office and will answer at once."

I did wait; and in less than five minutes the following was handed me:

Colonel Gorman's body just taken from ruins. Much burned, but positively identified by front teeth and seal ring. See to-day's *Herald*.

I sent this message to the newspaper office for posting, and went to my store. By this time boys were crying the New York papers of that morning, with full accounts of the burning of the Kremlin and death of Mayor Gorman. I purchased one and hurried into my office to read it. A letter lay on my desk, bearing the New York post-mark of the previous day, addressed to myself. I looked at the handwriting, and the shock made my head whirl. It was perfectly natural that *he* should write to me; but how it startled me to receive the letter after news of his death had reached me!

Inside the envelope I found four sheets of the Hotel Kremlin paper, covered with Ellard Gorman's well-known chirography and signed with his name. A liberal extract from the letter must be made here, though some of it may be omitted; but in the whole of it there was nothing contrary to the tenor of what is now given:

My dear fellow, I have now been in New York a whole week, and mine eyes are aching for the sight of dear little Montville! No place like home, *et cætera.* If I may not say that I long to meet *all* the inhabitants of our beautiful burgh (you know what I mean), at least I may avow that I am genuinely, in a general sense, homesick. According to programme, made when I left Montville, and intended to be punctually and literally fulfilled, I shall leave here (D. V.) at six o'clock A. M. of the morrow; and had I thought to invite you to a two o'clock dinner on that day, at my mansion, it would perhaps have been well.

And perhaps not! Hunt, you remember that I

opened my heart to you that morning, a week past, while we were waiting at the station. I astonished you. Now I may astonish you more.

I tried not to be downhearted; I trust that I impressed you, all the way through my doleful story, as a man who was bound and determined to bravely face his crushing misfortune and smile in the world's face, just as though the vulture was not tearing his vitals.

Did I succeed? I think I did.

There is one point, however, which, upon reflection, I doubt whether I made sufficiently plain to you. It was the only matter in our conversation that really embarrassed me.

When you bewailed the hardness of Fate, or whatever it be that moves us about like puppets, in thoroughly providing for the misery of us four in this world, and I tried to reassure and encourage you by declaring that I should probably not live very long, I believe that I failed entirely in conveying my whole meaning to you.

I hesitated to tell you what was uppermost in my mind. I am a practical man of affairs, and have gained large credit and confidence among men, as you can witness, by my shrewd common sense and good judgment. The "level-head" is what my host of friends and admirers have attributed to me.

Therefore you can understand my embarrassment in even trying to say to you, "Hunt, I have a strong presentiment that I shall never come back from New York alive. Something tells me that I shall never look upon Montville again." Had I said *that* to you, knowing me as well as you do, you might reasonably have doubted my sanity.

And yet, that is precisely as I felt then—as I feel now!

I will not reason with you about it; I utterly refuse to argue the case. I will not even say that I

am *not* silly and childish. What I *do* say is that I had, when I bade you farewell at the Montville station, a strong, overpowering presentiment of speedy death; that it has been with me ever since, is with me now.

Hence this long letter. If it really be that I am not to return, show it to Georgia. Tell her that I rely upon her generosity, upon her woman's sense of justice, to give Julia fifty thousand dollars. I charge *you*, Weldon Hunt, to see that this is done! I cannot think that Georgia will need persuasion to this end; but should she demur, remind her of the facts. Recall to her all that I told her in my madness, after Julia had repulsed me. Georgia well knows how nobly that woman's strong and virtuous soul stood out against the impulses of her heart; she knows—for I told her everything—how Julia Bement saved me from myself. Yet I have clouded the whole future of her for whom and for whose happiness—I hesitate not to say it—I would offer my life. To Georgia, then, through you, I would say, Don't, don't refuse what may be my dying request! I leave you, Georgia, with a fortune of which you cannot spend the income. The sum that I ask for Julia is miserably small as a reward for her adherence to honor and duty—little enough as compensation for her sufferings.

Farewell, Weldon—farewell, Georgia! I am warned by something beyond my power to comprehend that I shall not see the face of either of you again in the flesh. You believe you will be happier without me; may experience fully justify that belief! Tell all this to Julia.

In the newspaper I read the following:

BURNING OF THE HOTEL KREMLIN.—The well-known and extensive establishment of this name on

Broadway near Eighteenth Street was totally destroyed by fire last night. The alarm was given at half-past ten, and by midnight the whole great edifice was reduced to blackened walls and smoking ruin. Rarely is destruction by fire so complete and rapid. Its origin is a mystery, and will probably remain so; no theory yet advanced can account for the fact that the building was on fire in three different stories, and in several places in each story, at the same time. A brisk wind quickly fanned these separate flames into one roaring conflagration, which seemed to sweep away floors, inner partitions, roofs and contents as if by magic. The efforts of the fire department were wisely directed to confining the fire to this building, in which they succeeded; it was early seen that it would be idle to throw water into that seething pit of white-hot flame embraced within the outer walls of what was an hour before the great Hotel Kremlin. The theory of incendiarism naturally occurs, as to the cause of the fire; but guests and employees who have been interviewed have not, strange to say, a single fact at hand to corroborate it. An investigation will be made; but the case may be the curious, though not unprecedented one, of simultaneous accident or carelessness in several portions of the same building at the same time.

Some three hundred guests were in the house at the time, many of whom had retired for the night; and it is both remarkable and unusual, under all the circumstances stated, that but a single one should have perished in the flames. The saving of the hotel-register and the positive identification of all the guests but one, in connection with what is known as to that one, make it quite certain that the conflagration secured one victim. He was Colonel Ellard Gorman, Mayor of Montville, N. Y. He had been at the hotel for a week, and occupied rooms C-D, second floor, consisting of parlor and bedroom.

Not more than ten minutes before the alarm of fire was given the bell for these rooms rang, and a boy went to answer it. He rapped at the parlor-door, and, receiving no answer, opened it and entered. The parlor was vacant. Passing through to the chamber, the boy found the gas turned low, and the Colonel lying on the bed with his coat off. His person had become quite familiar to the lad, and he was easily recognized. In answer to a question, the Colonel said quite distinctly that he wanted nothing; that he had not rung the bell, and did not wish to be disturbed, as he was sleepy. The boy is quite positive that as he closed the parlor-door upon leaving, he heard it locked after him on the inside. Returning to the office, he was told that the bell of C-D had not rung; it was that of A-B, on the same floor, which he then answered.

Nothing has been seen of Mayor Gorman since the fire, and we deem it beyond doubt that his remains are in its ruins.

October 12, 1868. The date shows the lapse of two years and five months since the time of the last entries in this book. All that has preceded this, although in narrative form, is really a record, begun, continued, now, I trust, completed, as to the associations of the four persons who have figured in it. Commenced in despair, more as a means for relieving my overcharged feelings than from any other cause, it has been continued in time of doubt and uncertainty, and is now to be finished in the culmination of such happiness as even a merciful God does not often permit to His suffering children!

I know that it is not wise to keep a diary—if it be kept truthfully. A man ought to be careful what

he sets down in his own hand as to the comings and goings of himself with others. Long after he is dead, his statement may rise up in accusation against himself or his children. Realizing all this, still I choose to complete the record that I have thus far made. It has interested and occupied me in my darkest moments; let it now have light from the gladness and the joy of the present situation, and, thus rounded-up, let it be put away where it may not be seen in my life or the lives of those who come after me.

I sit here in the parlor adjoining my chamber, on the second floor of the great house lately owned by Ellard Gorman. The hour is almost midnight. The doctor has just taken his departure, reporting that all is well, and promising to return within four hours, after satisfying a pressing call. "But there will hardly be need of me then," he added. "Mother and child are both asleep, and likely to continue so for some hours. The nurse has my instructions."

But he was mistaken. Half an hour after he had departed I heard a sweet voice from the chamber. It finally called to me. I tiptoed softly to the half-open door; the lamp was turned low, and the nurse dozed in her chair. Who had called me?

"Weldon!"

The voice came from the pillow. Why, *she* was awake, pale and weak, but looking upon me with earnest and tender eyes.

"You must sleep, Georgia," I remonstrated. "The doctor said so. Your safety demands it. I have

been staying in the outer parlor, to see that there was no disturbance. Sleep, now, dear—sleep, and please me."

"In a moment, Weldon. There is something prevents my sleeping. I must tell you of it."

"Not now, dear wife," I protested. "Not till you are stronger."

"I must tell you *now*, so that I may sleep and be in peace! There has been a shadow upon me for these twelve months—ever since we were married. You have been kind; you have blessed and renewed my weary life; yet I have *so* often thought with a shudder of *him*—of his unhappiness after he wed me—of his dreadful end. Oh, Weldon! am I not to blame?"

"Hush, Georgia! If you knew how kindly, how considerately he spoke to me of you only a week before he died; how he pitied you for the sufferings you bore on account of that wretched mismating; if you knew you would not accuse yourself."

"But a woman's conscience is sharper than a man's! In the humbling of my pride that came with that frightful catastrophe of his death I saw myself as I had never seen before. I must have been to blame. Perhaps more sweetness, more loving kindness ——"

Her sad eyes eagerly sought my face for confirmation; she paused. I shook my head.

"God never joined you two," I said. "The minister said it, but there was never union of hearts. I knew you both better than others could know you; and I say there was none possible."

Her eyes were streaming with tears.

"I must make amends to him, Weldon," she said. "Where he is—oh, God, grant him happiness!—he must see us and know what we do. Let me show him that I am penitent for whatever wrong I did him."

"You accuse yourself unjustly. What would you do?"

Smiling through her tears, she turned down the cover and showed me the little, shapeless, expressionless face of our two-hours-old boy.

"Let me call him Ellard Gorman," she said.

"Why, Georgia ——"

"Do not say No! The burden will then fall from me. His sorrowful spirit will be appeased. Call it foolish, but don't deny me."

I consented. She thanked me with a smile and drifted off to sleep.

It is easy, with this told, to briefly set down what had gone before.

On the day next after our receipt of the news of Mayor Gorman's tragic death, a committee of three, appointed at a citizen's meeting, went to New York, and two days after returned, with the poor remains of our dead in a splendid casket. The committee were myself, Alvin Baker, and the president of one of the leading banks. I was satisfied, as the committee were, of the exact truth of what had been published; but we were almost compelled by the authorities assembled at the undertaker's establishment to be satisfied by personal view. The Coroner and his jury had just completed their sitting, and

their verdict had been returned according to the facts here stated. The whole casket-lid was removed, and the pitying shroud turned back from the hideous remains. Shuddering, with eyes half-averted, I gazed, as did the other two, not so much affected. Was this ghastly thing all that was left of the mortal part of brave, handsome Ellard Gorman?

So they said; and, controlling my horror, I recognized the peculiar filling of the teeth, grinning hideously, now, and the old English "G" graven on the large onyx-stone of the ring that surrounded the bony little-finger of one of the hands. The others also recognized these marks.

Tenderly, sorrowfully, we bore him back to Montville. It seemed as though the whole population was meeting us at that station. To the tolling of bells, the firing of minute-guns, the casket was followed by thousands to the court-house, where, guarded by the local militia, the remains lay in state three days. Never has Montville known such feeling. The press vied in eulogy; a public meeting expressed the popular grief; the funeral was attended by a vast concourse of civic societies, several military companies were not wanting, and the eloquent and touching discourse preached over the remains was heard by many thousands in the packed square where the funeral ceremonies were held, and was widely published by the press of the State.

Should I state the whole truth, it would have to be said that the last sods were hardly fitted upon

the grave-mound of the deceased before the popular question became this: Who is now best eligible as a candidate for Congress?

So he passed away. Men had wagged their heads wisely and said to one another, "Ah, his place cannot be filled!" But his death, like the death of the most eminent, resembled the casting of a stone into a pool. There is a slight disturbance; circles spring out, widen, and are lost; in a moment the pool is as placid as before.

In due time, as has been seen, I married his widow, and practically succeeded to the control of his great wealth. Moreover, I was elected to succeed him as Mayor.

Not only willingly, upon reading her late husband's last letter, but eagerly, did Georgia consent to the bestowal of fifty thousand dollars upon my cousin Julia. I promptly wrote to her, carefully and tenderly stating everything, not omitting Gorman's last message, and Georgia added a few lines. I begged Julia to accept the money, stating that it should be sent to her in any form she desired, and urging her to return to Montville, now that the reason for her exile was removed. I addressed my letter to Wycaseo; her answer came from elsewhere, with an illegible post-mark. It was a brief, stern reply—merely the words "No; never!"—written at the foot of the letter, and the letter reinclosed in another envelope. Secluded somewhere, her high sense of honor still prevails.

And here my record ends. In the boundless love of my dear wife, watching the growth of my darling

boy, rich, honored, prosperous—why should I not be happy? I am; yet often I think sadly of him who failed so miserably in reaching this blissful height, and whose life went out in such physical and mental agony.

PART II.

NARRATIVE OF ELLARD GORMAN.

CHAPTER I.

SATAN'S WHISPERINGS.

IT TAKES a man an ordinary life-time to get well acquainted with himself!

My experience with myself in the spring of 1866 convinced me that it is much easier for an honorable man to resolve to be a fraud and a cheat than it is for him to carry out that bad resolution.

I make no apology for the fact that the relations between my wife and myself grew cold—more than cold—after marriage. It simply could not be helped. I had committed the one mistake in life that cannot be corrected. It was one of the thousands of marriages that never should have been made. Love was impossible; there was no remedy but divorce, and that I would not have. I had a high position in society, in business, in politics, to preserve; hence I carefully instructed my wife as to our mutual duty in keeping up appearances.

I was perfectly capable of living and acting a lie in these odious bonds so long as my heart was not placed elsewhere—as I supposed that it never would

be. But the episode of Julia Bement shook me as an earthquake heaves the surface of the globe. There was a transformation of my moral nature. I became capable of almost anything to win her. For that time her steady refusal saved me from myself. She disappeared; for that time my honor was saved.

But though I strongly held it in check, my passion burned and glowed within me. The few weeks that followed were weeks of soul-torture such as men have suffered—but, I think, not many. Behind the cool and smiling aspect that Montville continued to see, the demon was raging. My occupations became hateful, my marital bonds intolerable, my brilliant prospects in life, even my wealth, but trivial. Such torment as I endured must needs have quickly been ended; it could end only by suicide or flight. Degraded as my moral nature was becoming, I never for a moment contemplated the former; whatever I have been, thank God I have no cowardice in me! I deliberately resolved that I would leave Montville and Georgia, once and forever. I would sacrifice all the possessions that were mine, of which my wealth, great as it was, possibly was not the greatest. I would go to Julia Bement—I would, if necessary, search the whole West till I found her—and I would say to her, "See, now, what I have done for you! I have thrown it all away for you and for your love. Refuse that love any longer and you make me a vagabond, a desperado, perchance—for some of the stern, lawless spirit that battles and wounds instilled into me slumbers yet in my breast. Have I not now convinced you of my sincerity, of

the depth of my regard for you, when I have actually sacrificed everything for you, as I not long ago declared that I was eager to do? Then let us turn our backs to the dreary past, and somewhere—as far off as you please; I care not where—find compensation for what we have suffered." Thus I resolved I would speak to her; and now she must consent! She had shown me her heart—"she will not deny me now," I said.

With this determination secretly made, now appeared what may be thought a strange phase of my character. Being resolved upon this course—being determined, as might be thought, to undo myself forever—it may be asked, "Why hesitate and scheme about it? Why not take an abrupt flight and enter at once upon the new existence that you have proposed?"

Ah, the question suggests the reflection with which this chapter began. It is easier to resolve to be a villain than to be one. Fortune might be abandoned with indifference; to leave Georgia and never look upon her face again would, I thought, be the greatest benefit that I could confer upon her; but my good name, my standing in the community, my military and civic honors—could I be willing to blast them all at a breath, if there were a way to save them?

No; this fair fabric I was proud of; it had been raised with great toil and pains; I would leave it as a fitting monument to myself when I should be gone. In the story of Montville, to be told by some future historian and rehearsed on great anniversary occa-

sions, the name of Ellard Gorman, its first Mayor, should be mentioned with praise and respect, and his brief but brilliant career should be stated with applause. I was acting deliberately now, as I was not on the first access of my passion for Julia.

What, then, was my alternative? In what way should I sunder my ties here, and drop forever out of the life of this city?

I gave deep and careful thought to this question, and decided that there was but one certain and safe way. My attention had frequently been turned to the great increase of "strange and mysterious disappearances" during and after the war. The newspapers were continually called upon to repeat the story of some countryman of wealth and high respectability journeying on some legitimate errand to the metropolis and there disappearing—as completely as though the earth had yawned and swallowed him. Absolutely nothing was ever heard of him thereafter, although "foul play" was always "suspected," and the police were invariably notified. At my leisure I had made a kind of study of this class of minor news, feeling, I presume, a certain undeveloped personal interest in the staple of such items. I was interested enough to scissor them out and lay them away, and by so doing I discovered that in a single year no less than twenty-three such cases were reported in one of the leading metropolitan dailies. I carefully abstained from talking with anybody on the subject; but my own reflections and my knowledge of the great city made me certain that in nine out of ten of these strange cases there

must be some other explanation beside murder or suicide; because even in thronged and hurrying New York, where thousands of criminal harpies press upon the steps of the ignorant and the unwary—even there, men are not commonly done away with so thoroughly that no vestige of them is ever found. Yet, as I had observed by frequent comment made in my hearing upon such items of news, the invariable explanation made by the people was that these unfortunates had been decoyed into secret haunts of crime, murdered for their money, and their bodies skillfully hidden. The death of the victim was always assumed, as a matter of course.

Having determined to leave Montville forever, these news-items and the popular explanation of them pointed me to my way. Death would leave my good name and fame bright; death in some other way than suicide. I resolved to go to New York—and to die there!

It will thus be seen that my conduct toward Weldon Hunt during my last two hours in Montville was simply a tissue of mixed hypocrisy and deceit. Yet it had another element, which the reader has already perceived. That man was really and truly my friend. I liked him well; indeed I had really admired him for his generous spirit toward me after his loss of Georgia, which the poor fellow took most deeply to heart. Now that my way was determined upon, I saw no objection in letting him know how discordant Georgia and I had really lived as man and wife, and that she had always loved

him. It would make *his* way easier and more certain after my disap——my death, I should say.

Mr. Hunt came to my house that morning by appointment. I had much to say to him; but when he appeared, I thought it policy to pretend to forget that I had requested an interview, and the subject upon which I had desired to speak to him. As for my errand—the contracting for sewer-pipe—almost anybody could have done it as well as I. Some fair pretext I must find to justify a trip to New York; and this seemed a sufficient one.

In further proof of my assertion that it is hard for a man to deliberately devote himself to wrong-doing without being hurried into it by a sudden excess of passion or some "lion-like temptation" unexpectedly springing upon him, I may state that my bad resolution was severely shaken that morning when I came to bid good-by to Georgia. In that moment all the glamour of our days of courtship came back to me, and her later sufferings were remembered. I took her hand and offered to kiss her. Had she exhibited any tenderness toward me then, it may be that I would have been overcome; the suggestions of the devil might have been cast out and a new affection planted in our hearts. I do not assert it; yet such a thing was possible with me. But she refused my kiss; she turned from me almost with loathing. From that instant I was as steel. I went right on, skillfully covering my tracks, resolved that they should never point toward Montville again.

The role of the hypocrite was a new and most

disgusting one for me; but I succeeded well with it in my long interview with Hunt. For one moment I did see suspicion in his eyes; his face showed that he believed my talk preluded flight. How admirably I did lie to him! How I talked of duty, and bravery in standing up under the ills of life, bearing our burdens manfully, even to the grave, and all that rot! *I* to talk thus, when I was coolly meditating all that he faintly suspected me of—and worse! I thoroughly imposed upon him; but he will never know how I writhed inwardly at the lie, and how I hated myself for it. Still, much of my emotion was genuine; no need of counterfeit in talking of those two women!

He believed me when I repudiated the idea of absconding. The suggestion must have seemed absurd to him when he came to think it over! A vague hint that I would probably die first nicely laid the foundation for my subsequent letter to him from New York. For that purpose, also, the disclosure about Julia became necessary.

I had no fear that either Georgia or Hunt would ever betray the wretched secret of domestic misery at Gorman place, nor the episode of Julia Bement. There would be no object for them to do so; their own happiness in the future would require that these things remain buried.

My letter from New York, written the day before the news of my death reached Montville, was intended to strongly emphasize the idea of a presentiment. A shrewd stroke of business also entered into it. If I could induce Georgia to send to Julia fifty

thousand dollars, after my decease, upon the plea of simple justice to a noble woman who had abandoned her situation and departed from Montville for *my* honor, as well as her own—if I could by a strong appeal cause this to be done, I would find the money when I found Julia!

As it was, I was compelled to leave home but slimly provided. The money that I happened to have in my safe that day—about five hundred dollars—I transferred to my pocket-book. I had large balances in the banks, and stock-certificates and bonds of great value deposited; but I dared not disturb either. I knew something of the skill and persistence of the American detective, and how swiftly, when suspicion has been strongly aroused, he will go on from discovery to discovery. I would not leave a clew behind that would lead men to suspect that I had not died an actual and *bona fide* death. I had to sacrifice my property to that end.

These were the circumstances under which I went to New York in May, 1866. Men usually go forth to premeditated or compulsory death with fear and trembling. I, debased in mind as I had become, journeyed to that last goal with outward composure and inward joy.

CHAPTER II.

COLONEL GARBUTT OF ALABAMA.

WHEN I registered at the Kremlin, on the same evening, I was at once recognized and cordially greeted by the head clerk. He may have remembered me, as I had often been a guest at this house during the past three years; but I presume he had the accomplished hotel clerk's trick of following the registering-pen and reading upside-down the name of the new arrival.

"I shall stay a week," I explained, "and I very much want my usual quarters—Rooms C–D, second floor. I am so used to them that I never feel at home without them. How is it?"

"You are fortunate, as usual, Colonel Gorman;" and now, from his use of the title, I knew that he *did* really know me. "Those rooms have but just been vacated by Senator Blank, who has been holding a continual reception there for the last few days. I am glad to be able to let you have them. Your baggage will be sent up immediately."

Following the bell-boy who was sent to open the rooms for me, I went up, looked about the familiar and elegantly-furnished apartments with as much satisfaction as I was able to derive from anything not directly connected with the great scheme that was laboring in my mind, and then devoted ten

minutes to removing the dust of the journey, refreshing myself with water, assuming clean linen, and making myself generally presentable. Standing before the tall mirror and viewing my face as I brushed my hair, I reflected—nay, I am not sure that I did not say it—"Well, Ellard Gorman, you certainly don't *look* like a scoundrel. Do you mean to be one?"

Conscience was protesting and objecting; I was trying to silence the monitor with a certain fallacy that seemed unanswerable to me. "I am injuring nobody but myself," was my answer. "I am making great sacrifices. It will be best for all concerned that it should be as I design. All the deceit that it involves will be richly compensated by the good that is done." And then came the severe questions: "Oh, is it *right?* Would you approve it in another? Are you satisfied with yourself?"

The man who attempts to argue with his conscience will get himself silenced after a very short debate. Upon this rejoinder I went out and slammed the door, and descended to supper.

Later in the evening I walked and smoked in the well-lighted lobby, meeting no acquaintance among the well-dressed crowd of sitters and perambulators, but observing with interest the well-conducted and chatty throng. Feeling inclined to a walk on Broadway, I accosted the clerk on two subjects that were active in my thoughts.

"It is my custom," I said, "when away from home, to leave at the hotel office an address that a telegram may be sent to, in case of accident."

I wrote upon the back of my card "Weldon Hunt, Montville, N. Y.," and handed it to him.

"An excellent precaution," he observed, as he examined the card. I thus insured the dispatching of prompt intelligence of my death to my home.

"Having frequently occupied C-D before," I continued, "I am familiar with the privileges that attach to them. I would like the little key."

He smiled, and handed me out a small brass key which had often been in my pocket before. Then I started upon my walk.

There shall be no mystery as to the incident of the small key at the clerk's counter.

The Kremlin was a favorite resort of out-of-town politicians and statesmen. It had often happened, in those brisk times of politics, that both rows of parlors and chambers on the second floor, along the Broadway front and on the side-street, were fully occupied by gentlemen of this class. For their accommodation, early in the years of the war, a private entrance had been constructed on the side-street, communicating with a narrow stairway emerging by a door into the side-corridor of the second floor. It was an extremely desirable arrangement for the public men who patronized this hotel, and the secret seemed to have been well kept. Reporters lying in wait at the front entrance and in the lobby for distinguished men were thus foiled of their prey. Persons whom Governors, Senators, Representatives, and even Mayors wished to see, without notice being taken of their introduction, were admitted to this little side-door and taken up

the private stairs. It was an excellent arrangement, with which I was well acquainted, and the benefits of which I had often had.

Upon this visit I asked for the little key, merely because I knew of its existence and its use. I had no plan in mind connected with it; indeed, I had postponed until the morrow all thoughts as to how my death should be accomplished. I asked for and obtained the key only because I was entitled to it, with no formulated design of using it for my present purpose.

Once on the Broadway sidewalk, I stepped out briskly, and walked along with the great procession that flowed down, glancing with placid curiosity at the equally numerous one that passed on the inner side, going up. I was, strange as it may appear, exhilarated in spirit; the sights and the sounds of the great thoroughfare gave me keen enjoyment, although I was quite familiar with them. How and by what means my plan was to be carried out I had not seriously thought of; all that I had postponed to the morrow, resolving to utterly free myself from care till then. I had endeavored to throw off all mental disturbance on account of the great deception I was about to practice upon thousands of people, and already I was beginning to feel practically severed from all the ties that had bound me to Montville.

Turning on Chambers Street, I walked some distance easterly, having in my mind merely that I would go on for perhaps two hours, taking my way at hap-hazard, returning to the Kremlin by some

roundabout route, and particularly desiring to extend my ramble far enough to get rid of my mild excitement, and to tire myself so that I should be insured a sound sleep.

The crowd of passers was thinner here, and as I proceeded my eye was caught by the advancing figure of a tall, erect man. The casual glance that I gave him as we met under the gaslight produced the impression that he was rather a distinguished-looking person. His eye met mine, and he brought up his hand in a military salute. I responded in the same way, from habit, and the incident would doubtless have slipped from my thoughts in a moment but for what followed. I had not advanced ten yards when a voice spoke close to my elbow:

"I beg your pardon, Colonel, but as you passed me just now your face looked very familiar. Are you not—is it possible that I have the honor of addressing Colonel Jenkins, late of the—ah, yes, of the Twenty-First Regiment of New York Volunteer Artillery?"

We were standing at the outer edge of the walk, away from the press, and I looked him all over before I answered. My "distinguished-looking personage," seen closer and examined critically, was resolved into a seedy and impudent vagabond, with some faint remains of a former far-away respectability lingering about him. The velveteen coat that he wore tightly buttoned at the throat and across the chest, probably to conceal deficiencies of linen, was frayed at the edges and faded; boots, trousers and hat had each seen much better days.

Still, his shabby clothes were carefully brushed; even his broken foot-wear had a good polish; his hands were cased in a pair of old gloves, and he swung a little rattan-cane. A clean white handkerchief protruding from the breast of his coat somewhat relieved the prevailing seediness of his attire. At another time I would not have noticed him at all, or would have repulsed his advances. In my frame of mind that night I felt more like humoring the fellow. It was easy to see that some form of beggary was concealed under this shabby-genteel exterior and polite address; but I did not anticipate the shape it was to take—nor really care what it might be.

"No," I replied, "you are mistaken. I am not Colonel Jenkins; and since there never was any such organization as the Twenty-First New York Artillery, I could not have been of it."

He was not in the least abashed.

"Well, well; I beg your pardon again," he said. "We are all subject to mistakes, you know; even Homer nods and Shakespeare repeats. 'To err is human; to forgive, divine.' Error is common to poor human nature; would that I, even I, had never committed a greater one than to mistake you for the actual colonel of an impossible regiment. Yet, by your bearing, your military air, and the general aspect of your presence, I think I shall not mistake again in saying that you have been a soldier. Is it not so?"

The easy impudence of the fellow amused, while his talk really interested me. Though stilted, it was

correct and grammatical, and his language was full of quotations and references such as only an educated man could use. His voice betrayed the alcoholic hoarseness, but was often quite musical. Seeing him and hearing him for three minutes showed me that here was an unusual character, who doubtless had seen fortunes and vicissitudes that it might be interesting to hear about. The hour was early, I was quite in the mood for such an adventure, and the man was perfectly sober. I determined to humor him.

"Yes, I was in the war," was my reply.

"I knew it, sir—I knew it! Upon the prevailing side?"

"I was colonel of a Union regiment."

"Then, sir, the happiest man in this metropolis greets you to-night! I am Colonel Garbutt of Alabama! I fought under the Stars and Bars from Manassas to Appomattox, and am now proud and happy that this glorious land has one name, one nationality, one flag, one destiny! Sir, let us shake hands across the bloody chasm!"

I complied, feeling more decidedly amused at his gasconade.

"Your pardon again, Colonel; but what did I understand your name to be?"

"As I did not mention it, I hardly think you understood anything about it."

He was not at all set back by this rebuff. His eyes had a droll expression, and he nodded his head to show that he knew that my reticence on that point was designed.

Two policemen had passed us while this colloquy was going on, and from the way that their glances lingered on my distinguished companion I saw that he was well known to *them* at least. I was in danger of becoming conspicuous through my company.

"I don't wish to stop on the street talking," I said; "but if you choose to walk my way, very well."

"Why, with great pleasure, Colonel," he briskly responded.

My invitation encouraged him to offer to take my arm, which familiarity I promptly repelled.

"Do not presume too much on short acquaintance, Colonel Garbutt of Alabama," I remarked, with good-humored plainness. "If you have anything in particular to say to me that you think I would be interested to hear, just keep on talking as we go on, and I will listen."

"Ah, brave sir, you're a man after my own heart! I think I can interest you; I can tell you of my necessities, of *one* pressing necessity in particular; and what could interest a large-hearted citizen of the world like yourself more than the woes of the unfortunate? For what says Virgil: 'Having been miserable myself, I learn to pity the misfortunes of the wretched,' or words to that effect. May I not assume, sir, that your own couch has not always been spread with roses? And you have been a soldier. Ah, what sings our own gentle poet!

> The bravest are the tenderest,
> The loving are the daring.

Let me, then, make a practical application. You

look upon a victim of circumstances, sir; of circumstances so hard, that he who addresses you has not tasted food this day. Colonel, there is a place on Chatham Square, well known to me, where for the small sum of twenty-five cents I could procure a full meal, were it not for those same disgusting circumstances. You understand me; why should one gentleman be offensively explicit with another?"

The trifling nature of his appeal, following the turgid and flowery preface, rather inclined me to laugh; but as I looked at him I was startled to see ravenous hunger appealing to me from his eyes.

"I shall be happy to supply such a need," I hastened to say. "Take me to the place, and I'll cheerfully order your dinner, and pay for it."

"Colonel, you're kind, *too* kind! I can't find it in my heart to put you to all that trouble. The restaurants of Chatham Square are hardly the correct thing for *you*, eminently satisfactory as they appear to me. Give me a quarter—possibly your kindness might make it a half—and I'll remember you in my prayers for many a night."

"See here, Colonel Garbutt of Alabama!" was my very plain reply, "I am willing to satisfy your hunger; but as for giving you money to get drunk on, I must decline. The locality you name is pretty well known to me; I will risk myself with you in one of its eating-houses for one evening. Come along, and show me the place."

Not the slightest offense did he take at that or any other of my language. We walked on, his tongue running glibly.

Behold us two seated on opposite sides of a small table in the corner of a low-ceilinged and not over-clean resort upon one side of classic Chatham Square. Similar tables are located thickly about the dingy and poorly-lighted apartment, at which various flashily-attired youths, Jews, sailors, and an occasional countryman, are refreshing themselves with food and drink. At a bar-counter on one side two men with their coats off are laboring hard to supply the demand for drinkables; waiters circulate among the tables; a haze of cigar-smoke hangs overhead; there is a combination of smells about the place not altogether pleasant. A murmur of talk, laughter, and an occasional oath sometimes rises above the minor key; and at intervals the music of two strident violins breaks forth from a slightly-raised platform at another side of the room, where two alleged musicians industriously saw away at the strings, as if to earn their hire by main strength. Occasionally an overdressed and much-rouged young woman appears on the platform and sings with great force and expression, but less melody, such songs as "Dearest Love, do You Remember?" "When Sherman Marched Down to the Sea," and "We Parted by the River-Bank."

Having ordered a full supply of provender for my guest, bidding the waiter not to limit him to the usual twenty-five-cent allowance, I sat and really enjoyed the spectacle of the poor fellow satisfying his hunger. I enjoyed it, and yet shuddered at first in watching him, for there is something painfully like the ferocity of a wild beast in the actions of a half-

starved man, excited by the smell and the sight of food. He ate ravenously, and surprised me by the quantity that he consumed before he admitted himself satisfied. He was not backward in hinting that liquor would be agreeable; but I overruled him and called for coffee, of which he swallowed three large cups, black and strong.

Most men become reasonably familiar with their own personal appearance, through the daily operations of the toilet; and as much as a man may, I knew myself, outwardly. Watching this man as he ate, for his babbling tongue was silenced for the time by the operation, I made a small discovery that rather disquieted me.

His face strongly resembled my own!

It was, of course, merely an accidental likeness; but the fact at first annoyed me. He was at least fifteen years older than I, and dissipation, possibly want and care, had hollowed his eyes, wrinkled his cheeks, and dashed his brown hair with gray; but the shape of head and face, the contour of features, even an occasional expression, I recognized as my own. The resemblance was much increased by the long, pointed mustache and imperial, *a la* the then reigning Emperor of the French, which each of us wore.

All this might not have occurred to me but for the opportunity he was furnishing for close inspection; and presently I observed another coincidence of appearance that was curious, at least. In youth, my own teeth, not naturally of the best, had been neglected, and the whole front row of the upper

jaw was saved only by very skillful dentistry and a lavish use of gold-filling, which was conspicuous whenever I laughed or smiled. I was, of course, very familiar with this part of my physiognomy; and as I continued to look across the table I saw that the man had the same peculiarity, appearing quite as plainly as it did in my own visage. There was the same visible filling in the same teeth.

With a sigh of satisfaction he at last laid down knife and fork, and began an effusive tribute to my generous hospitality, as he phrased it. I stopped him for the moment with a cigar, and lit one myself; but a casual remark that I made about one of the war-songs that had been sung while he ate started him off with a magniloquent review of his own military experience, which he consumed a good fifteen minutes in outlining. I had supposed that I had accurately taken the fellow's measure by this time, and could not be surprised at anything he might say; but the cool effrontery with which he described the most impossible events in battles where I had myself borne some small part, his extravagance in telling of his many wounds and desperate deeds of valor, and the easy familiarity of his frequently-spoken "That was the day when General Lee said to me"—"Just then Beauregard asked, 'Where's Garbutt?'"—all this made me see that I had fallen in with the most accomplished liar I had ever met. He was continuing in this strain, his voice rising above the rasping of the fiddles and the high notes of the vocalist as she poured out a heart-rending ditty, when I silenced him.

"That will do, Colonel Garbutt of Alabama. You have no more right to that name than has that screeching girl over there. It is an insult and an offense to me that you presume to parody the bravery and self-devotion of the people of the South with all this bombastic false pretense. It's lucky for you that you have eaten at the same table with me; that is all that prevents my handing you over to the police. You are a first-class fraud, sir!"

I spoke with a severity that was assumed for the occasion; and the adventurer did not misunderstand me in the least. He half-closed one eye, and drew down one corner of his mouth in assumed humility, as he replied:

"Now, don't be hard on me, Colonel! A gentleman is driven to do many things that his conscience would not approve here in this roaring Babel of New York. This present 'racket' that you have detected me in (pardon my use of the slang) is well-calculated to work upon the sympathies of the Union soldier who is not so sharp and so experienced as yourself. It stands me well, sometimes. But, as 'one man in his time plays many parts,' so also do I. The role of the one-legged sailor is not a bad one; I am quite perfect in that. In favorable localities, when the time serves, you might see me as a patriarchal doctor; I sell marvelous cures for all known diseases, advertising the business with such strength of lung and felicity of talk and anecdote as sometimes bring me a harvest. Indeed, it would take time barely to enumerate the different lines of business that I am capable of. Just now, as you see,

my fortunes are at a low ebb. The police are my enemies; they seem to have a deep-rooted prejudice to the exercise of honest industry."

"I presume you are acquainted with the geography of Blackwell's Island?" I queried, taking him at his humor.

"Certainly—certainly! And I haven't the slightest resentment now against the mistaken functionary who insisted on my taking a trip up there. I tried hard to convince him that I was a gentleman and only slightly exhilarated, but 'twas no use."

I looked at my watch; the hour was but a few minutes past nine. Things in the appearance and talk of this vagabond Crichton were continually coming out that startled me. When I noticed a certain resemblance in our faces, conscience faintly suggested to me, "Considering the way on which you have now entered, will you not look like him, be like him, ten years hence?" What he had just said about disguises recalled my thoughts to my yet unformed plan of disappearance, and it instantly struck me that this fellow's cunning, skill and experience might be of the greatest use to me. To that end I proceeded to ascertain all I could about him.

"Although," I said, "it is none of your business what *my* name is, I want to know yours. I have a proposition to make that will benefit you."

"Agreed. My own name I have had little use for of late years, but it's mine, just the same. It is Lawrence Galton. You may call me Larry, for short, as the boys used to at school."

From a handful of coins in my pocket I selected a five-dollar gold-piece and held it up to him. He looked at it wolfishly.

"I propose to give you that," I said. "If I do, will you promise not to get drunk on it?"

"I swear it! Have I not had enough of putting an enemy in my mouth to steal away my brains? Do you think I would dishonor——"

"Come, come, Larry, no mock-heroics. I merely want you to keep reasonably sober for a week, which you can surely do, if you try. Do you know anything about making up the human face in a disguise, as well as the person?"

"I know all about it. Why, I am a professional actor. Get me the materials, and I'll fix you out so in half an hour that your bosom friends wouldn't know you."

"Very good. Next Tuesday night, say at eight o'clock, I want you to be at the private entrance of the Kremlin, where I am stopping. But——"

I bethought myself that he could not know the exact place, and was about to mention the street and tell him to be there, not far from the Broadway corner, at the time named, when he answered promptly:

"I know the spot. I'll be on hand."

"How did you learn about that entrance?"

He chuckled as he replied:

"Not long ago I met a good-natured-looking gentleman, and worked one of my sympathy rackets on him. He felt in his pocket, and found no small money. 'Come to the Kremlin at seven,' he said,

'and I'll give you a dollar.' I went up there, and in at that hour, and was promptly kicked out. Loafing in the street, I saw my gentleman come along with another. I got something from each of them, and observed them enter by a little side-door. Since then I have seen others go in that way. You'll find me at the right spot."

I handed him the coin, settled the score, and left the place, followed by Lawrence Galton.

"Until we reach Broadway," I said, "you may walk along with me. Are you willing to tell me all about yourself?"

"'The proper study of mankind is man,' Colonel, and I don't know of one of the species more interesting to me than—your humble servant."

"Well, go on and tell me all about yourself. The information may help me to make up my mind as to just what service I want of you."

"Business is business, Colonel. You are calling upon me to unveil the harrowing past. I'll do it—for a consideration. You have treated me generously; but, I put it to you: should a man of refinement and sensibility, such as I, expose the errors and follies of his life to the gaze of curiosity—except for a consideration?"

The shrewd rascal saw that I was really desirous of hearing his story and proposed to make the most of his opportunity. I gave him another five dollars; and while we walked the streets I listened to his candid narrative of degraded honor and lost manhood.

The briefest outline of what he told me will suffice

for my present purpose; there is no need of encumbering *my* narrative with the details of the sorrowful story. He was the only son of a Connecticut clergyman, and in boyhood and youth was the spoiled darling of his doting mother. His father was stern and unbending, both in theology and family discipline, and it was clear that the first errors that had turned his promising life astray were not his own. Between the harshness of one parent and the weak indulgence of the other, his plastic mind became variable. A fatal vacillation was stamped upon it which he never outgrew.

His course at college was interrupted by frequent suspensions and other forms of discipline, resulting from the habit that became the bane of his life. Near the time when he would have graduated with high honor, some unusually flagrant conduct on a drunken frolic caused his expulsion. His father, smarting from the disgrace, forbade him the house, and never spoke to him again; his mother clung to him, wrote him comforting letters, and sent him money.

That he had talents of a high order his conversation sufficiently proved to me. He needed nothing but balance and industry. He went to Boston, studied for the bar, was admitted, and made a brilliant opening. For a few months all went well; he was acquiring practice and earning money; and then the demon of drink again overpowered him. After a long debauch he came to his senses at sea. He had actually shipped before the mast on a China ship!

For two years he led the dog's life of a common seaman. On his discharge in Boston he learned that his parents were both dead, and that he was entitled to their small property. He lost no time in converting it into money and in entering upon a spree that almost killed him. He awoke to consciousness that time in a hospital, weak and penniless.

The same dreadful shadow clouded him in everything that he undertook. He had wonderful and versatile capacity for intellectual work; he became by turns an actor, a reporter, a lecturer on scientific subjects, a political speaker. In each of these lines he had more than excelled; he had given bright promise of high success; but always his fatal appetite dragged him down. He amazed me by the assurance that, after he had given up all hope of reformation, he had gone to the West as an itinerant preacher, holding forth to great crowds out-of-doors, and becoming widely known as an eloquent exhorter. A remark that he added showed the self-confidence as well as the recklessness of the man.

"Few preachers, I fancy, ever drew the tears that I have from the people, in the same time. You doubt that? Colonel, you keep me sober for a week, and in ten minutes I'll have any congregation crying that you may set me before."

His habits, of course, brought him into disgrace and new downfall upon this strange mission; and then he had drifted to New York and joined the great army of its cheats, impostors and shady folks who live by their wits. He had already sufficiently described to me his way of life here.

Our walk was long-extended before he finished his story, and I had become tired enough, in mind and body, to warrant the hope of sleep. I stopped near Broadway and tried to dismiss him.

"That will do, Larry. Come round Tuesday night, where I told you. Don't mention this to any one. Good-night. Keep straight."

"Colonel—just a minute."

I turned back harshly.

"What's the matter? You want more money, I suppose."

"No, sir; I don't. It's unkind in you to say that!"

I was never to have done with surprise at the fellow. There was actually an unsimulated tone of honest indignation in his protest!

"I wasn't thinking of money at all, Colonel," he went on. "You regard me as nothing but a debased scoundrel; and sometimes, when I'm getting over one of my long debauches, and remorse is gnawing my very heart and brain, I think more poorly of myself than you possibly can now, and I feel as though I deserved to be forsaken by God and man. But I tell you, there's a little good left in this miserable hulk yet; and because you've treated me so handsomely I'm going to convince you of it. Look at this!"

He held up his hand to the light of the nearest lamp—a small, slender hand, white and delicately-veined, with taper fingers and oval, well-kept nails; a dainty, even aristocratic hand, that had escaped all the wreck and ravage wrought upon the

man by his ruthless enemy. I became so interested in looking at the hand that he had to tell me that he wished me to look at something else.

"The ring," he said; "on the little finger."

A new surprise! It was a large, blue onyx-stone seal ring, with an old English "G" finely cut upon it; and it was the very counterpart of one that I wore. Two could not be made more alike.

"Where did you get that?" I asked.

"Get it? I've worn it since I was twenty years old—now most thirty years ago. It was my poor, dear mother's gift after I was expelled from college; when I came home, and father turned me away, minister of God as he was. 'Go, wretched boy!' he said. 'Go, and never let me look upon your face again. Bring not your disgrace home to me—I will not have it.' But mother followed me to the village; wept over me; made me promise to reform; kissed me and hung upon my neck, sobbing that *she* would never give me up; and, last of all, she gave me money and put that ring on my finger. 'I meant it for your present when you should come home with your diploma, Lawrence,' she faltered. 'But you shall have it, anyway.' Poor woman—poor woman! She went to her grave broken-hearted over me. I never saw her after that day. Well, Colonel, I'm bad enough, God knows. I've been about as low down as a man can be; I've walked hundreds of miles of railroad track; I've pawned watch and even coat for food; I've been hungry for days, as you found me this evening; I've walked the streets all night, in lack of where to lay

my head; I've begged; I've borrowed, when I could; almost stolen; but I never gave up that ring! When I was footsore, fainting with hunger, driven from the barns where I had sought shelter by men and dogs, and the money I could have got for that ring would have made me comfortable for weeks, I would not sell it! I never will part with it; to the grave it shall go with me, whether that'll be in one of the rivers or the Potter's Field. It's the one thing that reminds me of a time when I was loved, when I had hope! Ah, God; does she see me now? Does she love me and hope for me still?"

He bared his head; he raised his hand with the glistening ring; his upturned face quivered; tears rolled upon it. Thus I left him as I walked quietly away.

CHAPTER III.

AT A CRISIS.

DURING the following day I called at the addresses given me by Hunt, and transacted the business which was the pretext and excuse for my coming to New York. It had not occurred to him or to any other in Montville to ask me why I need take a week to discharge a very simple matter; but the fact that I was a public man and a rising politician was of course taken into account. That I should deem it advisable to pass a week in the metropolis at any time would be deemed at home the natural and correct thing. That "the Mayor is in New York" would be satisfactory to everybody.

With this errand off my hands, I set to work seriously to contrive how I was to disappear in such a way as to cause a certainty of my death to be felt. I had supposed that the way would easily present itself when I got ready to seek for it. Now, to my surprise and consternation, I found that I was unable to devise anything that would be satisfactory to me. My smartness was not of that kind.

By simple and silent flight I should be self-betrayed. The evidence that I had stopped at the Kremlin, how long I had stayed there, and when I had left, would appear on its register.

Various clumsy devices, such as the attempt to get false intelligence into the newspapers, were considered and rejected. Such imposition would certainly be detected. The more I thought it over, the clearer it appeared to me that the men who "mysteriously disappeared" in New York, through some other agency than a criminal one, either had their plans skillfully laid beforehand or were remarkably favored by chance. I was very anxious to know how they did it!

The week passed on and I could make nothing of the riddle I had set myself. I pondered upon it in my rooms by the hour; I walked the streets and sought the solution; I went down the bay and up the rivers on the boats, thinking, watching, striving for a hint to point the way out of the difficulty. I even attended the theaters, hoping to get light from the plots of the plays. All useless; nothing came of it. The thing had evidently been often done—but how?

I grew restless and feverish; I began to dread meeting somebody from Montville, lest my abstraction and nervousness should be noticed. The more obscure the way out seemed, the closer I clung to my cherished project of disappearing with honor. I was at last driven to the desperate strait of relying wholly upon the quick wit and large experience of the vagabond Galton to contrive what absolutely baffled me. I had proposed merely to make use of the fellow's cleverness in an incidental way, but now I found myself actually depending upon his ingenuity and impatiently waiting his coming. On the afternoon of the morrow I should be expected

home, according to my own promise; and I could have cursed myself in the slow-creeping hours of that Monday and Tuesday for not having made an earlier appointment with Galton. I had exhausted my own ingenuity; I turned to his.

On the afternoon of the day last named I carefully wrote the letter to Hunt that has been referred to, and paced my parlor, wearing away the time. I was in the presence of a crisis.

An unthought-of phase of the present situation suddenly occurred to me with a great shock. For a moment it upset me.

Assuming that Galton would be able, upon my demand, to propose an acceptable plan, what was to be done with *him* when it had been put into execution? Could I leave the cunning rascal behind, ready to sell my secret for money? No! But what was the alternative? Simply to take him with me, wherever I might go, in order to insure his silence. I thought of Julia, of my hastening to her with this horrible encumbrance, and I groaned in the torment of my spirit. I should be a modern Sinbad, carrying on my back another Old Man of the Sea!

At half-past seven I stood by the railing above the basement on the side-street and waited. In a few minutes a man came lurching heavily up, and accosted me in a thick voice. With anger and disgust I took him by the shoulder and turned his face full to the light. Here was Mr. Lawrence Galton, eyes blood-shot, face all aflame, and bearing with him plenty of other evidence of indulgence in a protracted spree.

"Wretch!" I said, retiring from him, "get out of my sight. I want nothing more to do with you."

My anger somewhat restored his faculties. He spoke intelligibly, though with frequent hiccoughs.

"Don't leave me here, Colonel," he pleaded; "I've got a den over on Mott Street, where I can lie down. Help me there."

"Go to the devil!" was my savage answer.

"The police will get me if you go away. I don't want to be sent up now; I want to help *you*, the only man that has been kind to me for years. Let me lie down, and I'll be all right in three or four hours."

Without answer I unlocked the small door, and was about to enter and close it in his face when he uttered a last appeal.

"You might be in my place now, Colonel, if—if things were different. Maybe you'll be there yet. Think of *that*, and don't be hard on me."

In his sober senses, in his most brilliant moments, the vagabond could not have uttered words to cut me more keenly. Like a flash I saw myself as I was in that hour, morally bankrupt, deliberately planning a monstrous fraud in the wild pursuit of happiness, and still striving to preserve the poor thing that I called my honor. What was *I*, that I should judge him?

All repulsive as he was, I seized him and dragged him inside. I helped him up-stairs, luckily meeting no one in the hall, and soon had him safe in my chamber. I held him at the wash-basin and compelled him to wet his face and head; I helped him

off with his coat and boots, and conducted him to the bed. He was asleep in two minutes.

His reproof had startled me so that I felt not the least anger toward him. I was troubled and confused, but still had some hope that he would sleep off his debauch before morning. Sure that there was no present hope of his waking, I left him and went out on the street again. I turned the gas low, but in my perturbation forgot to lock the door leading into the hall; which circumstance I recalled afterward.

CHAPTER IV.

MY DREADFUL DEATH.

I HAVE a confused recollection of wandering that evening for two hours in the lower part of the city. I remember some of the places that I visited, and what I did there; as to other of my movements, my mind is a blank. The time was so near at hand when I must decide, and everything was as yet so undecided, that my mental disturbance grew more and more acute, and rapid physical motion became positively necessary. Strange to say, as I roamed and ruminated, my thoughts hardly went back to Lawrence Galton at all. The poor creature had well-nigh dropped out of my calculations; my mind was running on disguise and deception, without anything yet being evolved out of the chaos. Hence it was that I found myself passing along Chatham Street, pausing to look at the curious displays in front, and listening to the voluble chatter of the sharp Isaacs; hence I allowed myself to be taken by the arm and conducted into the mysterious recesses of one of these receptacles of very second-hand clothing, and all odds and ends. I must have said something to the proprietor about disguise, for I was taken still further back, old suits were overhauled and displayed, and I was assured by the eager Is-

raelite that he was dying to fix me out "shoost so lofely as never vas." In some way I effected my escape from him without making a purchase at that time, and next came to a realization of mundane things within the Bowery Theater, where a roaring and highly picturesque melodrama occupied the stage, to the vociferous delight of a crowded house. The piece was full of action, violence, shrieks, powder and blood, and seemed to be perfectly understood by all but me. In a few minutes I wearied of it and went out to roam again. I remember looking at my watch near the City Hall and finding that the hour was after eleven.

Not long after that I thought of Galton, and the suggestion that I ought to look to him at once took possession of my mind, just as other ideas came and went on that turbulent night. I took my course up Broadway. Above Canal I heard the rattle and roar of steam fire-engines going by, and presently I was conscious of a decided drift of the crowd in the direction I was pursuing. A thick volume of smoke rolled up ahead, and there was a bright glare that made the vicinity painfully light. The crowd quickly became dense, and struggled to get on. I struggled with them, and was making my way through, when I reached a point where a cordon of policemen, stretched across the street, barred any further advance.

The dense mass of people heaved and surged restlessly, as agitated as a mountain torrent would be if checked in its course; a rising murmur ran through it—the collective sound of subdued speech;

while from up the street could now plainly be heard the roaring and crackling of the flames, the outburst of torrents of water from the pipes, and even the fierce hissing of the two elements as they met. Blacker and more densely rolled up the smoke, and the heat became so intense that the crowd where I stood felt and yielded to the backward flow from above.

"What is it?" a man near me asked.

"The Hotel Kremlin," somebody replied.

My heart took a great bound, and then intermitted two or three pulsations. My excited imagination leaped forward and grasped the possible result. My way was being shaped for me as I could not design it!

I was pressed up against a lamp-post by the continued surge of the crowd. I lifted myself so that my feet rested on the slight projection formed by its decreasing size, and my head was elevated above the mass. Then a magnificent, a fearful sight was opened to me. The long, lofty front of the Kremlin was illuminated by fires that burst from every window and thrust thin tongues up through the roofs, the wind drifting the smoke away as it rose, so that the whole lurid picture was visible. The heat had driven everything human from the street in front; the firemen were playing their streams upon the adjacent buildings, hoping to confine the conflagration to the hotel. How long I held on to the vantage of my observatory I do not know; the spectacle fascinated me, and I hung to it despite the pain of strained muscles and aching limbs. I

heard the crash of falling roofs-and inner walls, and saw the brilliant display of millions of sparks shot skyward. I held on after that, while the fire seethed white-hot through the debris, and occasionally forked out of window-openings. I held on till nature would bear the torture no longer; and it was after midnight when I yielded my place and mingled again with the crowd.

Snatches of their talk reached me as I made my way out, striving to get down Broadway again. Incomplete utterances came to me — speech that I waited not to hear, but gathered up as I passed through.

"Man——"

"They say there was one——"

"Some man staying——"

"Don't believe he could get——"

"One man burned up——"

The burden of the unvarying theme rang in my ears after I had cleared myself of the crowd and was again roaming the streets. It set itself to a dismal chant, which sounded through my brain as loud as though fog-horns and calliopes had shrieked it:

One man burned,
One man burned,
Burned in the Kremlin fire.

A horrible vision, too, went with me upon the wild, aimless wanderings of that night. It was of poor, stupefied Lawrence Galton, lying upon my bed in my chamber, smothered with drifting, rolling smoke before he could know the agonies of a worse fate, ere the hungering flames enveloped him, and the

tooth and claw of devouring fire consumed his miserable flesh.

The Isaacs of Chatham Street are early astir to catch the first drift that comes their way; it was not much past seven when I gained admission to the innermost *sanctum* of the one I had visited the previous night. In half an hour a man came forth from that den with clean-shaven face, hollow-eyed and wrinkled, stooping and feebly progressing with a stout stick, clad in a suit aged enough to call for respect, with a battered slouch hat shading his face. He had required the clothes he removed to be burned before his eyes.

He made his way slowly to the nearest news-stand and purchased a morning paper. He turned eagerly to the account of the burning of the Hotel Kremlin. He read that it was very certain that one of the guests had perished in the flames; for Mayor Gorman of Montville could not be found, and the statement of the bell-boy seemed to leave no doubt of it. And then the lame old man smiled, for he knew that he was himself dead!

CHAPTER V.

A MODERN MIRACLE.

BUT I could not be content with the apparent result of the amazing train of circumstances that had occurred. I wanted assurance that all was as I wished; that there was no expression anywhere of lurking suspicion as to the *bona fides* of my death. Secure in my disguise, I resolved to delay my departure until I should be fully assured.

In the afternoon I went to the scene of the fire, and with a thousand more watched the streams playing upon the burning ruins. I heard much talk of efforts that were soon to be made to take the remains of the unfortunate man from the blackened and charred wreck of the hotel. Waiting for awhile to see the attempt made, I became weary and went away. I returned to the poor lodgings, suited to my outward appearance, that I had taken in Avenue B, and slept through the day. The needs of nature would assert themselves over my nervous strain and bodily exhaustion.

Sallying forth again at night, I learned from the evening papers that the remains of the missing guest of the Hotel Kremlin had been taken from the ruins, both face and body so frightfully burned and charred as to be past identification; but that, fort-

unately, there were marks which made the recognition complete. A peculiarity of the gold-filling of the front upper teeth, which was unaffected by the heat or fire, was immediately recalled by the head clerk of the hotel, who said that he had often noticed the same in Colonel Gorman. The bell-boy was equally positive as to this mark. Both these two and others also identified the great onyx seal ring on the skeleton little finger of the left hand, with its "G" in old English letter. The deceased Mayor of Montville had frequently shown it with pride, as the gift of the officers of his regiment when it was mustered out.

Thus the proofs accumulated; the evidence that I was really and truly dead thickened. On the next day a coroner's jury viewed the remains, took brief testimony, and returned a verdict that the remains were those of the Honorable Ellard Gorman, late of the city of Montville, State of New York, and that he perished by accident in the fire of the Hotel Kremlin, on the night of the eleventh instant.

Late that afternoon I gained access to the undertaker's rooms, where, in a costly casket, with the whole lid removed and a satin sheet covering, the remains had been placed. The crowd was barred out; I owed it to my pathetic plea that the deceased had been my friend, and that I wanted to look upon all that was left of him, that I was admitted. But a few were present; among them the committee from Montville, which had just arrived. I saw them; yes, I looked into the faces of Weldon Hunt and Alvin Baker, and Mr. Joy, the bank president,

unknown and unsuspected! The sheet was turned back from the horrid relics of humanity beneath—the ghastly, grinning skull, the protruding bones, the black integuments clinging to them—and the committee were invited to examine as to the peculiar marks noticed. Briefly they did so, and turned away, heart-sick but satisfied. I lingered a little. Relentless in my purpose, naturally unsentimental, I yet could bestow a lingering thought of compassion upon the poor remains before me. I even took the bony hand in mine, with the ring, the counterpart of which I had hurled into the East River that morning. My mind went back to the scene of my parting with the wretched outcast on the night of my first meeting with him; I saw again his delicate hand, his dissipated face raised tearfully to heaven, as he cried aloud to the mother, somewhere beyond, who had loved him above all heart break and sorrow. I do not often pray; the man intent upon the business that then occupied me can hardly have the right to pray; and yet something like a prayer inaudibly escaped me, that the mother who had borne and suffered and died for this poor lost child of the All-Father might now take him back again to her arms.

And still I was not content! Nothing but the grave, the report of the last obsequies, could satisfy me!

In due time this report reached the metropolis, and was published in all the daily journals. The extraordinary circumstances of the case, as well as

the well-known prominence of the deceased in local and State politics, made a lengthy mention of the proceedings at Montville good matter to print. News editors approved the long telegrams, and passed them all; and I suppose that a million people in this land read of the lying-in-state of the deceased Mayor; the public meeting that was held; the resolutions that were passed; the tolling of bells; the draping in black of the little city; the funeral sermons and orations; the firing of minute-guns; the parade of civic and military societies at the funeral; the deep grief that was upon the place.

I suppose that the people read all this. *I* read it, most eagerly. And reading it, I made the mental comment—"It does really look as if I were dead."

Not many days after the fire I was speeding West with all the power of steam. I was inwardly exultant, knowing that all bonds were severed that held me from Julia, impatiently hurrying on to find her, yet casting a final thought backward upon the strange situation I was leaving.

Ellard Gorman was dead and buried. There were thousands of witnesses to the fact. There were so many, that if it ever became necessary to prove the fact in a court of justice, the Judge would say, after a little, "Really, gentlemen, there is no use of piling up proofs in this way. You could not prove this man any more dead, or any deeper buried, if we should sit here a week."

Yet *I* knew that Ellard Gorman was on a west-

bound train, seeking a new life, turning his back on the past, and on all it had made him.

And I knew that the highest obsequies had, by a strange error, been paid to the wretched remains of Lawrence Galton. Dishonored, despised in life, death had brought him the poor recompense of such a funeral pageant, such mortuary honors, as are allowed to few Americans. Cheerfully I regarded it all as A MODERN MIRACLE.

CHAPTER VI.

A BAFFLING QUEST.

I HAD SAID to Weldon Hunt that I had no knowledge of the present whereabouts of his cousin. The statement was of course a falsehood. By means which it is unnecessary to mention here, I had satisfied myself that she had returned directly to Wycaseo from Montville. To the former place I now made all haste, boldly discarding my Chatham Street disguise west of the Mississippi.

In the last days of May I reached it, after a weary journey. I arrived late, was kept awake almost till daylight with delicious anticipations of meeting Julia in the morning, and with hopes of a welcome reception. In the morning I went forth eagerly, after breakfast, to prosecute my search.

Wycaseo had sprung into being upon the survey of the line for the first Pacific railway. The site was an inviting one among the foothills of the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains, and the road was rapidly being pushed out east and west. It was, as I saw it, a crude Western town, with disagreeably hilly and muddy streets, its outskirts breaking out into a profusion of frame buildings, and much temporary construction being seen in the business parts; yet it was already a thriving place, with a manifest future of growth and prosperity before it.

I walked along the principal street, and inquired the way to the High School. It was pointed out to me; a mammoth frame building, resembling an exhibition-shed.

I passed up and down before it. Observing a scholar entering the gate, I hastened to interview her.

"Is this the High School?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Who is the lady teacher?"

"We haven't any now. Only the minister's wife teaches till we get a new one."

"Who was the last lady teacher?"

"Miss Bement, sir."

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know. She went away a week ago. She'd only just begun the new term."

"Don't you know where she went?"

"No, sir."

I walked on. Here was disappointment at the very threshold of my quest. But I was prepared for even greater discouragement before my eyes should be gladdened with the sight of her who was all the world to me now.

Hesitating a moment as to where to press my further inquiries, the sign of the post office met my eye and I entered the building. I asked for the postmaster, and that official presented himself.

"I am looking for a Miss Julia Bement, who has been a teacher here," I said. "Did you know her?"

"Oh, yes; everybody in Wycaseo knew her; and right sorry we were to lose her, too."

"She has left town, then?"

"Yes; she had been East a year, and came back, to our great satisfaction. But she had only taken her place again, when such a promising offer came from the South that she declared she must accept it. So we let her off—very reluctantly, I tell you—and she left us."

"Can you give me her address?"

The postmaster looked forbidding and wise.

"I don't believe I can," he replied.

"That is singular," I ventured.

"Not so singular, either, if you knew the lady. But perhaps you did?"

"Yes; I have had some acquaintance with her."

"Then you may know the reason for her wanting to conceal her present residence; I don't. She's certainly a most estimable lady, and she's a right to have and keep her secrets, for all of you or me. My promise to her, as well as the general instructions of the post office department, absolutely forbid my telling you where she is."

I pondered a moment and grew heart-faint. What could this sudden flight, this concealing of her address mean, except that she feared my pursuit and importunity?

"She has correspondents here?" I suggested.

"One or two of our ladies. But you could find out nothing from them, even if you knew where to look for them. They bring their blank envelopes to me, and I direct them; they never see the address. Her letters to them are posted at some little Southern hamlet, where she persuades the postmaster not

to stamp them. Oh, I tell you that woman made good arrangements for not being discovered! She's a keen one."

I was becoming desperate as I listened. My funds were low, but I was in a fever to find Julia Bement. I took out twenty-five dollars and laid it down before him.

"Tell me where to find her and you shall have that," I said.

The man became purple and hot with indignation.

"What! You offer to bribe me? Get out of here, sir; I won't talk with you further."

"I beg your pardon; I did not mean to offend. But I am *very* anxious to find her. You would not blame me, you would try to help me, if you knew."

"Well, never mind. You look like a good fellow, and I'd like to help you; but I can't. What's your name?"

"Edward Hanchett."

"Ah! Did you ever live in Montville, State of New York?"

My heart beat loud and fast as I answered, "No; I'm from Kentucky."

The postmaster took a letter from a pile in front of him and held it up.

"People in that place write to her, and I send on the letters. Here's one just come."

I recognized the handwriting of Hunt. I knew that my directions were being promptly complied with; I was certain that the fifty thousand dollars would in due course reach Julia; here was doubtless

the information of my death and wishes, and proposals and requests about the forwarding of it. Oh, that I knew where to find her! I could wait patiently until I had learned that she had received this money, and then I would seek her out, tell her all, and urge her again to go beyond seas with me, where we might be happy.

"Sir," I said to the postmaster, "if that lady knew what I could tell her, she would be eager to see me. When she asked you not to divulge her address, she did not anticipate what might happen. Tell me where to find her and she will thank you, some day, quite as much as I will now."

The postmaster looked me over quizzically.

"I expect you're in love with the lady—eh?"

"Yes," I replied, doggedly. "Does that help soften you?"

"I can't say that it does. From the directions Miss Bement gave me, it's tolerable certain she isn't much in love with *you*. She seems to have been providing against just such onslaughts as you are making on me. No, Mr. Hanchett, I can't do it. Aside from my official duty here, I'll never have it said that I was false to a woman's confidence. You'll have to look somewhere else; but it's mighty little information you'll get in Wycaseo, I guess."

So it turned out. My inquiries were cautiously made, as I feared to direct attention and inquiry to myself. Weary days passed before I could get any light on her movements. She had carefully involved her flitting in secrecy, which puzzled while it could not discourage my ardor.

CHAPTER VII.

CHASING A BUBBLE.

A WEEK or two longer I stayed in Wycaseo. I exhausted all sources of information, and was at last rewarded with one small item that seemed to point the way to future discoveries. It was told me by two or three different persons that the gentleman who came to escort Miss Bement away from town had a trunk that was marked "Gardette—Natchez." He had not stayed at any hotel; I could not discover where he had stayed during the days that he was in Wycaseo; but the information given me contained a clew, which I promptly followed up.

With all speed I returned to St. Louis, and took passage on a down-river boat for Natchez.

Meantime, my funds were running low. Of the five hundred dollars that I brought from Montville, less than seventy-five remained. Brought sternly face to face with the question of ways and means, I began to see, as I had not seen before, the position in which I had placed myself. Not only had I surrendered my property, my name, and my very personality, but I had with these given up my credit. I was as unknown, as little respected, as the veriest tramp; and my credit was no better. I began to hunger for my relinquished wealth; for the large part of it that Julia now controlled.

For this reason, also, the pursuit of her became my only hope. "Find her," I said to myself; "tell her your story; show her your sacrifices and sufferings; put it truly and strongly to her sympathetic woman's heart, and you will win her." So I thought; and I husbanded hope and energy in the search for her.

It was a blazing day in mid-June when I landed at Natchez-under-the-Hill, slim in purse, feeble in body from long and overstrained excitement, and endeavored to walk a few rods to the hotel, while a negro carried my carpet-bag. I had not taken twenty steps when the porter cried out: "Fo' God, Massa, what's de mattah wid yo'?" My brain was burning, my strength was exhausted; I staggered and fell headlong.

It was some two weeks following this that I fully returned to life in the Natchez hospital. The doctor told me that some two dozen cases of yellow fever had been treated there during my time; that some not so sick as I had died; and that the fact of my own recovery was a wonder to him, which he could only account for by the well-known fact that some human constitutions would bear almost anything, and that mine seemed to be one of this class.

As I became convalescent, I noticed that flowers and fruit were frequently placed on the table at the side of my cot; and one day I remarked to the doctor that the people of Natchez were kind indeed to strangers, when such treatment could be given them as that which I had received.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "We do all we can; do it pretty thoroughly, too, until a general pestilence comes on, when we are obliged to appeal to our Northern brothers for aid."

"Perhaps you could tell me who it is that has been so kind as to send these repeated gifts of luscious fruit and beautiful flowers to me?"

"Yes—I could," he answered. "But, being under a pledge of secrecy, I won't."

That was all I could get from him. But a day or two later I found in a magnificent bouquet of Southern roses a card, bearing simply the name, "Gardette."

I grew strong enough to walk. Hungering to hear something of the place and the people where, as I could not now doubt, in this vicinity, Julia Bement had her home, I made inquiries on the streets. I learned that the Gardette plantation was some four miles back from Natchez-on-the-Hill; that it was the largest and most thriving of the cotton-lands of that vicinity; and that it was owned by M. Jean Gardette, a lately settled French immigrant, but practically carried on by his son Leon. Inquiring as to whether there was a member lately added to the family, I was told that a very fine lady had been there a few weeks—a Northern school-teacher, whom young Monsieur Gardette had brought down the river to educate the orphan children of his deceased sister.

That was enough for me. I went back to the hospital and wrote a long letter to Julia. I did not give her any details; I thought that would be better

done when we should be face to face; but I told her that I was free—that I still loved her as man never yet had loved woman—and I implored her to come to me.

The answer came two days later from the doctor. I understood it better than he did.

"You are well enough to travel, Mr. Hanchett," he said.

"I suppose so; but I don't want——"

"Ah, now, my dear fellow, please stop! I've rather taken a liking to you since you've been here; you really seem like a man of some education and refinement, who has had circumstances against him. Well, well, that's a very common story. I was only going on to say that a hospital patient who has been restored to life at the expense of the city of Natchez shouldn't be over-particular about his goings and comings. A charitable lady here has bought you a ticket for St. Louis; you will go by the morning boat. May good health attend you!"

"May I know who it is that takes such an interest in me?" I asked.

"No, sir; you may not," replied the doctor. "My instructions are positive on that point."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN VAIN.

I WAS back again at St. Louis, broken in health, almost penniless, on the verge of despair. Less than two months had passed since I had deliberately sacrificed everything to my passion for Julia Bement, and I had found that the sacrifice was a vain one, for she knew, she had learned in some way, of my sickness there in the hospital at Natchez; she had taken measures to provide for my comfort, but would not see me, would not so much as send me a reply to my fervent letter. Nay, I could not doubt, after what had happened to me, that the doctor was acting by instructions, or at least by request, when he peremptorily caused me to be put aboard the boat and taken away. It was plain, then, that Julia repudiated me. Her steady virtue still triumphed over love—if, indeed, she had preserved the least spark of affection for me.

So I had sinned in vain! So I had thrown away all and gained nothing in exchange. Not often does retributive punishment come so quickly in this world, following upon the heels of the offense, as in my case.

Still, I would not quite despair. I had not yet appealed to her as I wished. It could not be, I

thought, that the woman whom I had forced to the confession of love for me, though her flight had followed the confession, could now turn coldly from me. So I wrote her a long and passionate letter. With the utmost frankness did I lay bare my soul to her. Without reserve I told her what I had done, and that it had been done for love of her only. "You never would have advised it, dear Julia," I said; "you would not now consent to it if the matter were not already far beyond your power to influence, one way or the other. In brief, it is done! I come to you with my fate in my hands. Grant that it was wrong, that it had better not have happened. Still, it *has* happened. All that I said to you in Montville I say to you now. Think of my love, of my fidelity, if you must think of my sin. Let me visit you; only send me permission to come. Let me plead my case *now*, and I will answer for the result."

The letter was brief, but it spoke to her with a tear in every line—in such anguished words as the Peri outside the gates of Paradise may have pleaded for admission.

I addressed the letter to her at Natchez, care of M. Jean Gardette, signing it "Edward Hanchett," and requesting her to address me by that name. In feverish suspense I waited for a reply; in misery of soul and body, in the agony of hope deferred, I waited. Walking the busy streets I met more than one man known to me at the East; but I was secure against detection; nobody could have recognized me in the disguise that sickness and disappointment had

put upon my face. In two weeks the answer came, written in a strange hand, with the name "Leon Gardette" at the end. I read it, and saw every hope shattered at a blow. It said:

The letter which you had the effrontery to send to a lady now an inmate of my father's family was received by her. She will not reply to it, but she does me the honor to request me to make answer. I am not her confidant as to any relations that have in the past existed between the lady and yourself, but I assure you that her commands are positive that you must not annoy her with more letters; much less must you seek her personally. She bids me say that she perfectly understands the meaning of your letters, read in connection with one she has lately received from her former home in the North, and that they furnish the best of reasons why she should not see you. She would add, that, while she does not wish ill to you, she might be driven to the painful alternative of inclosing your letters to her correspondents at Montville, State of New York, in case your unwelcome attentions are continued.

An inclosed slip bore the following, in the same hand:

The within has been submitted to Miss Julia Bement, and is approved by her. I will now say a word for myself, which she will not see. I assure you that I care as little as I know about what the lady may have been to you, or what you may have been to her. The fact that I wish to emphasize is, that she is at present an honored member of my father's family, and that I will personally be very prompt to punish the slightest annoyance which

may be hereafter inflicted upon her by you or any other. You know the Southern way.

Was not this enough? I staggered when I reached the end, as though a knife had transfixed my heart. Absolutely hopeless now, I walked the steamboat-landing hour after hour, desperately resolved to get to her and plead with her, even if I died at her feet. If that was folly, it was at least the folly of despair. My wild face and distressful manner attracted the attention of a kind boat-captain; I told him, in answer to his question, that I was penniless, and that a case of life and death called for me at Natchez. With the humanity of his kind, he gave me a passage.

At Vicksburg many passengers came on board. Among them I recognized Julia Bement!

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST PANG.

I WAS SITTING by the rail on the side of the after-deck next the landing, and was immediately above the gang-plank. Recognizing her instantly, I could scarcely restrain my impatience to meet her, and had arisen, intending to hasten down the stairs, when I saw that she was attended by a gentleman. I ground my teeth and sat down again.

The influx of passengers at this point quickly filled all the vacant chairs on the after-deck, so that when Julia and her escort had come up there were none to be had, and some of the new arrivals were standing. I rose and offered her my seat. She looked me full in the face as she thanked me, but she did not know me! There was just an instant's hesitation, as though she noted something familiar in my features or expression; but there was no recognition on her part. Oh, heaven! what change must have come over me in a few weeks, when *she* could meet me and pass me by as a stranger!

"Excuse me for a moment," said her escort; "I will go and get the tickets."

He was a tall, shapely man, of about my own age, with aristocratic face and bearing, but with an unvarying pleasant expression, and a courtesy in his

manner that would impress any one. Though I marked him at once as the person who had replied to my letter to Julia, and though I was prepared to hate him, on account of the contents of that letter as well as of his present association with her, his handsome, manly appearance spoke for itself and compelled my admiration.

And Julia! Oh, how I loved her then, when she seemed infinitely removed from me! As grand as ever in her dark beauty, set off by her light costume and straw hat, I thought that her face was a trifle thinner, her mien a little more serious than when I had last seen her. But *she* was there!

I was standing directly behind her. Nobody was observing us; her companion was away.

"Julia!" I said, in a low voice. "Julia!"

Without turning her head, she answered me in the same tone:

"I know you. What do you want?"

"You know me?" I said, in amazement.

"Yes. You have compelled me to look for you, to expect you everywhere. Your conduct is more than bad; it is monstrous. I will not talk with you."

"Will you not give me a chance, elsewhere, if not here, to speak with you? If you knew——"

"I know too much! I cannot hear you. Better than any one else you *know* that you have no right to address such language to me. Will you not leave me? You will disturb my peace; you may drive me from my new home, as you did from the old, as you did from Wycaseo——"

"Impossible!" I interrupted. "What had I to do with your leaving there?"

"I cannot tell you now, and I wish no opportunity to talk with you again. Leave me. Mr. Gardette is hot-tempered; he might not control himself if he should find you here, and know who you are."

He returned while she spoke. From that instant she entirely ignored me, though I stood so near that I heard much of their conversation, which seemed to relate mainly to prominent features of the river scenery, he pointing out many places to her.

They went ashore at Natchez. There was a carriage waiting for them; he assisted her in, and I saw it driven off up the hill. What was he to her? And how did it matter, since I knew that she was nothing to me?

CHAPTER X.

A HORROR OF THE MISSISSIPPI.

AS THE boat cast off and steamed out again, and the buildings of Natchez, above and below, faded in the distance, a strong temptation beset me. The devil whispered loudly to me; he had lain much in wait for me of late. I walked well forward and stopped near the bow, looking about to see that I was not observed. I looked down into the rush of brown waters at the side; there was a moment's irresolution; yet I might have ended it all then and there—and perhaps that would have been better. A heavy hand was laid on my shoulder, and the cheery voice of the captain spoke in my ear.

"Now what's the matter with you, Ed Hanchett? Down on your luck, eh? You seem sour and moody. Thought you meant to get off at Natchez?"

"I did; but I saw the party on this boat that I was anxious to see. That made it unnecessary for me to stop up there."

"Ah, yes—I see. The 'party' was that superb-looking woman you were talking with on the after-deck. She had a handsomer man along with her. You didn't find much comfort in that quarter, I reckon. You have my sympathy; I should think you were old enough to have got over such troubles;

but it's the way of the world. Where are you bound for now?"

"To the devil."

The perfect seriousness of my reply amused him. He laughed long and heartily.

"Pshaw, my boy; pluck up heart and never say die. I half-believe now that you would have been at the bottom of the river if I hadn't happened along. Just quit all such notions. You appear to be a keen, clever sort of fellow, but poor and unfortunate. Cheer up, I tell you; stick to this boat, and I'll find you something to do. You'll get your courage back when you get busy. You're not going to the devil, by any means—if you *are* well on the way to New Orleans. So drive dull care away. Come into my cabin and have a glass of wine."

The captain's cheerful, hearty friendship lighted a little the gloom that enveloped me; it postponed, at least, the dark thoughts with which I was contending. Haggard, unkempt and ill-dressed as I was, there must have been something of the former stamp of high manhood in my face to arrest his attention.

I made the trip to New Orleans with him, and remained on the boat when she started for her return. I moved about in a mechanical way, just as I ate, drank and slept—regarding existence merely as a dead-weight. I watched and waited for some sharp, sudden visitation that would end it all and remove me from a life that had become a loathing to me.

Such a stroke I thought had come on the night

of August 9, 1866, as the Crescent Belle was steaming from Natchez on her way up.

We had taken many passengers on at that landing, and the boat was almost crowded. I sat at the stern and saw the lights disappear from the hill, beyond which was the mansion that sheltered *her*. The bitterness of death itself was upon me; I felt impatient for the stroke to come that would release me. Something like a prayer escaped me that it might end soon and suddenly. I acknowledged that the fault was mine, the hideous sin all my own; but I entreated the peace of the grave, the only rest that remained to me.

Life, in that moody moment, I thought not merely a paltry possession; it was an intolerable burden. Yet how we all cling to it; how *I* would cling to it, now that the occasion had come when I might relinquish it!

My reverie was dispelled by the loud noise of an explosion forward; the shriek of escaping steam followed, mingled with cries of mortal agony. I heard the shouts of the captain as he tried to give orders, which were soon drowned in that wild uproar of steam, and the screams of the living and unhurt who still saw their fate yawning for them between the devouring flames, the steam, and the blackness of the river below. The pilot turned the bows to the shore; but suddenly flames leaped through the deck, and masses of smoke were carried by the wind into the pilot-house. So sudden came this new danger that the doors and windows could not be closed ere the pilot and his assistant were

gasping for breath on the floor, while the smoke continued to pour in upon them. The wheel was idle; the great steamboat drifted down with the current, the steam still roaring, and the flames, swept by the wind, rapidly devouring the boat.

Seeing that the stern was the apparent place of safety, the passengers frantically rushed for it. The wind suddenly veered, and fire and smoke were driven upon the shrinking, panic-stricken mass. A pandemonium of sound followed; nothing more frightful can be conceived. I heard prayers, blasphemies, oaths and screams; men and women jumped into the dark water from mere fright; but the rapid march of the flames had seized the small boats, and those that we could see in the light of the flames putting out from the shore seemed to approach tardily. The merciless fire was driven right back by the wind; the heat became insupportable; dozens dropped or jumped into the water, which was thick with struggling, frantic victims. Taking the plunge, I became as anxious to save my life as I had been a half-hour before to lose it. Striking out boldly for the shore, I thought I had cleared the writhing, floundering mass, when I was seized from below and dragged downward.

CHAPTER XI.

A GLIMPSE OF PARADISE.

I HAVE read somewhere that the change from life to death is merely another kind of awakening, and that they who experience it recall the thing that we style "life" only as a kind of troubled dream.

In some days and nights of semi-consciousness I fancied that I was reaching another existence. It seemed as if it was not yet attained; but my spirit was continually mounting up and away from the sore warfare of the world. The past and its thronging scenes, especially the later ones, grew faint and dim. A certain rest and release were just within reach.

This was the delusion of a brain unsettled by shock and sickness, which was rudely dispelled as mind and memory returned to the wasted body. Little by little, in the intervals of waking, I began to take mental note of familiar objects. A large, cool room, with many cots in it; windows looking out upon a stretch of broad river, with steamboats plying up and down—surely, this situation was known to me. One day I recognized a face looking down kindly at me.

"Well, Ed Hanchett, you seem to be on the mend at last," said the doctor.

"Where am I?" was my feeble query.

"Back again in the Natchez hospital, to be sure. Where did you suppose you were?"

"Out of misery," I groaned. "You have brought me back to it."

"A hard job we had of it, too, you ungrateful sinner! You were picked up by one of the shore-boats the night the Crescent Belle was burned, with no more life appearing in you than in a log. We worked over your body till we got your breath fluttering a little—and now, at last, you seem to be in a fair way to live. But it has been a close thing with you, my fine fellow! Coming so soon after the yellow-fever business, it pretty nearly wound you up."

"How long have I been lying here?"

"A month, at least."

I closed my eyes wearily.

"Why did you not let me die?" I querulously asked.

"Tut, tut! We cure people here, when we can; not kill them. Stop talking and go to sleep."

So I was dragged back to suffering. More weeks went on. I slowly rallied, became able to be dressed and walk about, and to sit for hours by the window gazing out upon the river. I ate and slept in a mechanical way, and as convalescence brought back strength of mind, the mockery of thought still haunted me. I tried to shut the volume of the past, to accept my stunning defeat with composure, to resolve that I would go forth from this place to some career of danger, enlisting as a private soldier,

perhaps, and in the wild Indian warfare at the West court a fatal bullet or arrow. The *man* still struggled within me, urging me to die honorably, warning me against the cowardice of suicide. In this way I strove to take account of the future; while from each desperate resolve of this kind my maddening thoughts would fly to *her*, but a few miles from where I sat, banning me forever from her presence.

September was drawing to a close when the doctor one day asked me:

"Hanchett, do you feel strong enough to take a short ride?"

"Yes," I replied; "but I have no wish to."

"That's nothing to the case," he rejoined, with perfect good-nature. "Out-of-door exercise, by means of vehicle and horses, is directed for you, and I reckon you'll take it. Get ready; the establishment will be at the door in ten minutes."

The fact that in this instance, as well as in many others, I was much better treated than the other patients, occurred to me; but I was unable then to give it the proper significance. Presently I was taken out to the street, where a stately covered carriage of the *ante-bellum* period at the South waited. I observed a coat-of-arms on the panel, a negro driver on the box, and two spirited bays before it. The doctor shook me by the hand and gave me a smiling good-by; strange that he should do that when he was merely sending me out for a ride! A tall, well-formed gentleman, with fine face and a

grave smile, assisted me to get in, followed me, and bade the driver go on.

We went out over the hill and through the fertile plantation-country back of the town. Bewildered by what was occurring, I glanced furtively at my companion opposite me, whose curiosity mingled with his native politeness as he closely surveyed me. In a moment, seeing my embarrassment, he begged my pardon, speaking with a decided French accent.

"You have had a very narrow escape from death, Monsieur Hanchett, I am told. The second one, I hear, this summer. Fate is very unkind to you just now; I am happy to become the agent in bringing you where you may rest awhile and get back your strength. Permit me to present myself; I am M. Leon Gardette."

"I have seen you before," I said.

"Indeed! I don't remember having the pleasure of meeting you. Where could it have been?"

"You were on the Crescent Belle on her last trip down. You came on board at Vicksburg, with—with a lady."

He was slightly discomposed at my remark, but tried to laugh.

"Yes, that is true; but I did not see you; not in a way to remember you. You were not pointed out to me."

"Our acquaintance dates farther back than that, Monsieur Gardette," I rejoined, taking what occurred to me to be the easiest road to the discovery of the meaning of this present surprising episode. "After the rather peppery letter that I received at

St. Louis from you, I had no reason to expect so friendly a reception as this."

His smile was quite fascinating now. He made a deprecatory motion with his hand as he replied:

"Ah, fie, now! Why recall unpleasant recollections? Never would I have alluded to that letter, if you had not; but since you compel me to speak of it, I must. You have lived as many years in the world as I have, Monsieur; surely, you have learned that—how is it your English maxim has it?—ah, that 'circumstances alter cases.' What might have been quite proper for me to put into a letter to you in June would not be at all correct in September. Can you not understand?"

"I understand nothing about it. Less than anything else do I comprehend why *you* have taken the trouble to give me an airing."

He smiled again, but said nothing.

"Perhaps," I added, "you think my head is not in a fit condition for me to be told. But I insist."

"You are very pale, and you are weak, I know," he hastened to say, with sympathy in his face and voice. He dexterously arranged the carriage cushions behind me, and fanned me with his broad hat. "If it fatigues you to talk," he said, "let us be silent. The journey will be short."

I understood his meaning at last.

"Shall I not return to the hospital?" was my question.

"No. Did not the doctor bid you farewell?"

"I have a right to know what you propose to do with me. Will you inform me?"

"I am not forbidden to answer that," he gently replied. "But it may be better for you to wait, and let events disclose themselves. The doctor says you must not be excited."

"I will not be. Answer me!"

"Softly, softly! If you were not a sick man I should take offense at your tone. I am taking you to the house of my father, M. Jean Gardette. My intentions are quite friendly."

"Why should he, or you, desire such a thing? I am a stranger to you both."

"*We* do not particularly desire it," and he stroked his mustache rather nervously. "My father consents; I agreed to bring you there. Another person requests it."

My sluggish heart gave a sudden bound.

"Tell me who!" I cried, starting forward and laying my hand upon his arm.

With his unfailing courtesy and good-nature still on the surface, I plainly saw that he looked annoyed.

"You may as well know to-day as to-morrow," he slowly replied, "since she would tell you then. It is Ma'm'selle Julia Bement who would have you brought to our place."

I fell back in a delirium of joy and hope. My companion assiduously fanned me, and through my half-closed eyes his face appeared somber to me, as though jealousy gnawed him. But to my excited vision the gates of earthly Paradise seemed again opening.

CHAPTER XII.

WITHIN THE GATES.

THE CARRIAGE turned into a wide driveway and stopped before a large mansion, surrounded with verandas. Mr. Gardette assisted me out and up the steps, and presented me to his father and mother. They welcomed me in broken English, hardly intelligible but for the smiles and gestures accompanying, which left no doubt of their meaning. He was a florid, hale old man, approaching seventy, somewhat unwieldy, pleasant and affable, with a suggestion in his appearance of appreciation of the good things of life. Madame Gardette was a vivacious little lady, whose charm of manner produced the illusion of beauty preserved, and whose voluble tongue ran briskly, upon my appearance and introduction.

"Ah, *charmante!* Ze friend of our dear Ma'm'selle Bement! Welcome, Monsieur—*tres* welcome! You do us too much *honneur.*"

"Here is one whom I believe you know," Leon said.

He led *her* forward. She stood before me, taking my hand with a grave inclination of the head and the words, uttered steadily and without emotion:

"You have heard your welcome, Mr. Hanchett.

I can add nothing more—only the hope that you may remain here until you shall be quite restored to health. Madame kindly promises me that."

I mumbled some reply—what, I know not—and presently we were all seated in cane-chairs under the shade of the veranda-roof. What was I to say—how say it? The cordial reception by the family amazed me; Julia's appearance and manner puzzled me. There was a seriousness in her face that was new to her; her greeting was distant in manner and words, while her expression was that of profound compassion; and ever, as she turned to me and spoke some commonplace, sorrow and pity shone in her dark eyes. Altogether, I was encouraged, if mystified. It swiftly passed through my mind that my late misfortunes and dangers had touched her heart, and that pity would reinforce unwilling love for my final victory. For why else had I been brought here? How otherwise had she, the inmate of this family for but a few months, been able to influence her patrons, her ardent lover, even, as Monsieur Leon seemed to be? If admitted here at all, must it not be in the character of Julia's possible suitor?

So I was convinced, and my heart rose. The actions of Leon strengthened my belief. Unobtrusively, and with little talk, he was industriously attentive to Julia. His eyes followed her motions; he anticipated her wishes, bringing her water, handing her a book or a fan, before she could make the request. I admired the devotion that was so plainly hopeless, and inwardly exulted at the assurance of my own success.

Sitting next to her, the sight of her face stirred the fever in my heart. I could not wait.

"Let me thank you, Julia, for the kind treatment that you have at last given me," I said, in a low voice. "I have not deserved it; yet I thank you. As soon as time and place favor——"

She stopped me with one look.

"Please say no more on that subject," she said. "You are an invalid at present; we have brought you here to aid your recovery. When that time comes, I wish to talk of yourself; not before."

She showed neither confusion nor impatience; she spoke steadily and composedly, looking unwaveringly in my face. There was nothing in either words or manner to discompose me, save her utter lack of warmth. But I would not torment myself with misgivings, now that the path to success seemed so surely open; and meanwhile, I was interested and even pleased to see the eyes of Monsieur Leon bent on us with attention and a kind of silent inquiry.

I tried to relieve my feelings with a blundering attempt to convey my thanks to Madame Gardette for her kind hospitality. I put it into very bad French, which Leon was kind enough to interpret into the genuine tongue.

The old gentleman looked on and listened, nodding his acknowledgments, while the vivacious French woman broke out into an ecstasy of superlatives, to denote her pleasure, which her son was so polite as to render into English. It was delightful, she said, for her husband, her son and herself to be of service to an unfortunate gentleman; but she insisted that

my first thanks were due to Mademoiselle Julia. It was *she* who had represented the hardness of my case—sick almost to death, seeming to be pursued by misfortune, alone among strangers, far from home—ah, it was an honor to womankind that their dear Ma'm'selle could feel so! Though she believed that I was not an utter stranger to their governess——

"I had merely a slight acquaintance with the gentleman some time ago at the North," Julia hastened to interrupt. There was a faint tinge of red in her cheek; but she avoided my eyes. Madame smiled graciously, and said—"Exactly; and that circumstance made Ma'm'selle's humanity and kindness not less worthy." The speaker and her family were glad indeed to second such fine manifestations of soul, and she trusted that Monsieur never would be sorry for the days that he had sojourned with them in search of health. With which pleasant speech, on the appearance of a colored servant, the lady asked us in to tea.

Several coy and bright-faced children glanced in at the open doors while we sat at the table, and then ran off with peals of laughter. They were the orphan grandchildren whom Julia was trying to tame and educate, I was told. One I observed then—a little, deformed, misshapen thing with a crutch—who alone came to the table at Julia's call. Her eerie black eyes looked me all over, and with the liberty that I soon discovered these children had at all times from their indulgent grandparents, the little Ninette demanded to know who I was.

"A poor gentleman who was almost drowned in

the river when the boat was burned," Julia answered.

"Ah, *pauvre homme!*" said the sympathetic little creature, her eyes filling with tears; and she scampered off to convey the news to the others.

These people were all careful and considerate for me; they would have had me go to bed at nightfall, insisting that I must be weary. But I declared that I needed nothing so much as the tonic of their kind company and conversation; at which the old Frenchman and his wife smiled, and Julia turned to me a face that was distinctly sympathetic. It was she who arranged a shawl about my shoulders, and a spread over my lap, that I might not suffer from the cool air of the night. The moon was flooding the grounds with light, while we sat in the shade; I sought to take her hand, but she hastily withdrew it.

My first evening at the Gardette mansion was a specimen of many that followed during the ensuing month. The heartiness of the old people, the unfailing politeness of Leon (whatever else I might think of his conduct), and the sympathy manifested by Julia, although accompanied by a puzzling reserve, all united to place me in the position of one of the family. I loved to chat with Monsieur and Madame, and my French improved so in a fortnight that I was quite able to carry on an ordinary conversation with them in their own tongue, while their English gained correspondingly. I learned, to my surprise, that they had occupied this place but little more than a year. The death of two idolized

daughters in quick succession in their charming home at Versailles had filled them with a grief that had taken on a not uncommon longing for new scenes. Leon, to whom Parisian life was everything, had been reluctantly brought to their way of thinking, and the family had emigrated to the United States. The former owner of this plantation was an old friend; he had become discouraged by the ravages and losses entailed by the war just closed, and was willing and anxious to sell out. Leon, they said, had taken hold briskly, had hired the former slaves of the place, was studying the subject of cotton-raising, and with the experienced help that he found in the white overseers, some of whom drifted back after the war, he was hoping to make a grand success as a cotton-planter. His parents hoped that they all might end their days in this delightful place.

Even in the absence of Julia, I would make no inquiries about her; but the garrulous tongues of the old people did not leave me long in ignorance as to how she had become known to them. It had occurred by a curious chance, they said, for which they were very grateful. Early in the previous May, Leon had been filled with curiosity and interest by the newspaper accounts of the prosecution of the work on the Pacific Railway, and he took a brief trip up the river and over toward the mountains, to see for himself. At Wycaseo he visited everything in the town that was to be seen, including the school; and when told that the lady teacher, whose ability as an instructress had excited his admiration, had

expressed a desire to go to the South, he bethought him of the children left by one of his sisters, and of their need of a competent governess. He sought an introduction, explained the situation and his wishes to the lady, and offered her a liberal salary to accept the place. In twenty-four hours he produced to her such telegraphic indorsements and assurances from Natchez that she could have no doubt of the person with whom she was negotiating; and the matter ended with her resignation at Wycaseo, and her coming South with Leon.

Having heard this much, my thoughts went back to that stern, brief interview on the boat, when Julia informed me that I had driven her from Wycaseo. I could understand it no better now than then.

In all this talk of the old people, extended through many hours when I sat alone with them, I sought by various artful suggestions to discover whether they knew that Leon was Julia's lover. They made it quite plain to me that they had never suspected anything of the kind. All their praises of the governess, great as they were, stopped far short of the idea that she might be their daughter-in-law. They talked of her as they might have talked of a superior servant, who was admitted to be a companion; and as for Leon—his mother shook her artificial curls coquettishly at my suggestion of marriage, and declared that when her boy became ready for *that*, he must go back to *La Belle France* and bring her the daughter of a Duke or a Marshal.

In those delicious nights upon the veranda, when

the fierce heat of the Southern sun had subsided, and the air was cooled by breeze and dew—there, and sometimes walking in the magnolia-grove that fronted the house, and listening to the rapturous song-birds—a spirit of contentment gradually stole into my breast. It seemed to me that the delicious peace and rest of this new life *must* be the forerunners of a happiness to come. Julia had not spoken; I had at times, when I was able to exchange a few words with her alone, urged her to speak; but she had invariably turned me off. "When you are well and strong, Ellard," she had once said, "I must have a plain talk with you. I will select the time; you cannot hasten me." These were her words; and, unable to give them other meaning, I took heart from her use of my Christian name, and her reassuring, gentle way. Without impatience I waited; the time could not be much longer deferred.

I saw her not many hours during the day. We met at the table, in the evening, and sometimes for an hour in the afternoon; but her duties as governess absorbed much of her time, and when I was able to see her briefly alone, her decided utterance always stopped my appeals to her. "Not now—wait," she said to me a dozen times. So I waited and hoped.

The rather ostentatious politeness of Leon Gardette toward me was changed into a manifestation of something like real feeling and good-fellowship, as I fancied, when he learned that I had been a soldier. He had himself borne a commission in the French service in Algeria in two of the most san-

guinary campaigns with the natives, and the experiences that we were able to exchange gave a friendly zest to our intercourse. In several ways I thought he showed that he was not regarding me as a mere transient guest. He took me on long horseback rides over the great plantation, explaining to me much about cotton culture, and what he expected to accomplish; he told me with some pride of his system of dealing with the freedmen, and what large results he would reap by it. Like most Frenchmen, he grew very enthusiastic over any subject that interested him, and he spoke of this one with a species of eloquence.

I thought I would try for a discovery.

"This is all well, Monsieur Leon," I said one day, after listening some time to him. "I rejoice at your good fortune and prospects; I trust you may not be deceived in them. But I am only a guest and a sojourner with you; I almost feel that I have abused your hospitality. Why should not I leave to-morrow?"

His bright face suddenly became serious. "Are you wearying of us?" he asked.

"No; only wearying of an uncertainty, of a cankering pain that ought to have been stopped, some way, weeks ago. Why am I here? Leon Gardette," and I became warm with excitement, "you don't treat me fairly. *You* brought me here. What was it for? Don't tell me that old story about hospitality, the wish that I might win back my health and strength, and all that. You have all been kind; but that does not explain the situation. Tell me what it all means."

We were sitting on the sward holding our horses by the bridles. He looked hard, almost sullen, and viciously pulled the grass.

"I don't know," he answered. "When you *must* know, ask Ma'm'selle again. Insist on her telling you. 'Tis not for me to speak."

I learned that night.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM.

MY COLLOQUY with Leon Gardette had at once shown me that there was some mystery under the surface of my hospitable treatment here, and his reticence upon my demand seemed to indicate that it was at least in part known to him. I reflected that Julia, in order to avail herself of his help in writing the letter I had received at St. Louis, in getting me dispatched thither from the hospital previously, and, again, in bringing me to this mansion, must have found it necessary to give Mr. Gardette a part of my history. Yet I could not suppose that she had put him in possession of the whole incredible drama in which I had figured; in fact, I had seen nothing between the two which would justify the belief that she had treated him with such extreme confidence. While I could see that he admired her, he seemed very cautious in the manifestation of the sentiment. So far as I was able to judge, she seemed to give him no encouragement, treating him at all times with the same high-bred politeness that she showed to others. I had not known of their being alone together for an hour since my coming to the mansion. What, then, was the mystery? How could Leon Gardette, my rival,

as he assuredly was, look with any complacency upon my presence here, and be to some extent in the confidence of Julia as to myself, while she so obviously discouraged his suit? And her change toward me—what had caused it, how far did it extend, and why was she unwilling to frankly avow it to me?

I resolved to follow Leon's advice and insist upon her speaking out. Circumstances favored me a few hours later.

The four orphaned grandchildren of the old people were a wild, spoiled set, whom Julia had scarcely succeeded yet in disciplining into obedience, though she had won their childish affection from the start. Very shy of me at first, they gradually made me their friend and playmate. Poor, deformed little Ninette was especially drawn to me; so much had she suffered from the pains of her misshapen limbs that her sympathies were actively stirred in behalf of any one else who had endured pain. She would sit on my knee and make me describe to her over and over the scenes in the Natchez hospital, my weary sickness in the yellow-fever time, the burning of the steamboat, the horrid sights and sounds attending it, and my sensations upon being dragged down into the swift waters. Then she would stroke my hair and softly whisper in my ear, "Oh, *pauvre homme*—why does the good *Dieu* make us suffer so?"

At twilight of that evening I saw Julia and her pupils walking in the garden. I joined them, and was noisily welcomed by the children. As the night

advanced they were gently dismissed, one by one, to their chambers, each receiving the coveted kiss from the governess. Ninette lingered till the last, and was loath to go. The black domestic stood waiting to carry her in, but she clung to Julia.

"There; good-night, Nina," said the latter. "You shall come to me when you wake in the morning."

"Just a little minute, dear Ma'm'selle! I want to ask you a question."

"Well, Ninon?"

"Why does God let me suffer?"

The woman's dark eyes swiftly sought my face.

"I cannot tell you, child. We must believe it is for the best."

"No; I won't believe that! God is good, is He not?"

"Yes; He is our Infinite Father."

"Yet He makes me suffer; and poor M. Hanchett, too. It is not kind of God to do that. *You* are kind to me, Ma'm'selle, are you not?"

"I try to be, Ninon."

"Ought we not to be kind to all that are afflicted?"

"Yes, *ma fille.*"

"Shouldn't we be kind to poor M. Hanchett?"

"Of course; but how your tongue does run on, to-night!"

"Won't you be kind to him?"

In the faint glow of the twilight I saw a deeper damask stealing over Julia's cheek. The child's random tongue had touched the old chord.

"You're a very silly little Frenchwoman," she playfully replied. "There—there's your kiss! Now let Cassy take you away."

But the child clung to her neck. Her wayward spirit demanded an answer.

"I won't go till you tell me," she insisted. "Will you be kind to poor M. Hanchett?"

"Yes," was the low-voiced answer.

Child and attendant were gone. Julia and I sat upon the same rustic seat. She was strangely calm; but in my breast hope and fear battled together, and my tongue at first refused me utterance.

I heard a step; Leon Gardette stood near. Discovering us, he turned and disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

HEART WRESTLES WITH HEART.

"IT IS TIME," began Julia Bement, "that you were undeceived. For weeks I have seen with pain that you would still pursue me with the offer of a love that I once rejected forever. I have much to say to you; but *this* it is better to understand at the start. The answer that I gave you at Montville I now repeat. Never can I give you another. 'You must take your way alone; I cannot walk it with you.'"

Her voice was firm; in the fading light I could not see her face.

"This is worse than mockery; it is cruelty!" was my fierce protest. "Why have you brought me here, putting me in a situation where I must be near you each day, and thus fed the flame of the passion that has wrecked my life?—why have you done it, knowing that you meant to craze me at the end with the heartless words you have just uttered? Woman, tell me—why have you done it?"

I seized her hand; she uttered a cry that was like terror at my savage words and rude act. I heard hasty footsteps approaching, and Leon Gardette was there again.

"Did I hear you scream, Miss Bement?" he

asked, with a menace in his voice that was meant for me.

"No—it was nothing—only an insect on my neck," was the reply. "Please wait till I am in real danger, Mr. Gardette, before you become my champion."

She tried to say it laughingly. He slowly retired.

"You see you must be calm," she resumed, "if you would talk with me. I have had reasons for all that I have done toward you. I have waited for this interview until your strength has returned; now it shall be no longer put off, painful as it will be. But once for all, sir—I use not your own name, because you wish never to hear it again—once for all, blame me not for your wrecked life, for the consequences of your headstrong passion. I warned you in time; I bade you leave me forever; if I was weak enough to be surprised by your vehemence into a confession that I loved you—the only act of my life that shames me!—I told you in the same breath that such a love would be as vain and as wicked on my part as on yours, and I fled from you. Not once, but twice! At Wycaseo I read in the newspapers the accounts of your tragic death at New York, and I accepted the first offer that would take me far from that place. As well as I could I provided for secrecy, trying to cover the goal of my new flight so that you would not find me."

"You talk in riddles," I impatiently said. "What reason had you to think I could find you, if you believed me dead? Did you expect to be haunted?"

"I did not believe you dead! Perhaps I am the

only one whom you never duped by that stupendous fraud. Knowing you so well, having listened to your mad avowals, I saw artifice and deception where others saw only a horrible death. How it was contrived I know not, and do not care to know; but the truth, the shocking, amazing truth, I divined from the first."

She astonished me with this declaration. It at once cleared up much that had puzzled me in her conduct.

"You guessed it, then," I said, "before you received Hunt's letter?"

"I did; that letter only confirmed my opinion. I saw your hand at once in the offer of money, and I sent that letter back, indignantly declining the offer. Man, you little know me, if you thought you could make me a partner in a conspiracy—an odious, monstrous deceit!"

I was abashed and silent. My doom seemed plain enough now; but I resolved to assail her heart at the proper time. She went on, with rising spirit:

"You have charged me with cruelty in causing you to be brought here, knowing what the end would be. Listen! When I saw you struggling with disease in the hospital, I pitied you; because I pitied you, I wished to be kind to you, as poor Ninon just asked me to be. I could not visit you alone, but all that I could do for your comfort when you were recovering I did. Of course, it was I who caused influence to be used with the authorities to send you back to St. Louis; I caused that for-

bidding letter to be written to you, when you again tried to communicate with me; I bluntly refused to recognize you on the boat at Vicksburg. All this I hoped would discourage and dishearten you; I trusted never to see you or to hear from you again."

"But you changed your mind," I interrupted.

"Yes; you shall know why. Hearing that you were again nigh to death through the disaster of the Crescent Belle, I pitied you as before; I took care that everything possible should be done for you; I might then have visited you at the hospital, but never would have caused you to be brought here out of pity and kindness only. I had another object; the time has come for me to disclose it. I have a duty to perform toward you."

"A duty?" I echoed, somewhat awed by the solemnity of her voice and words.

"Yes, a duty. I bid you retrace your steps. It is not too late; that way alone lies your safety. Go——"

"No—never!" I cried. "Do not seek to move me in that way. My course was deliberately chosen; it is too late now to go back, even if I wish to do so. You are the arbiter of my fate; accept my love, my unswerving devotion, and you will fill me with new life and hope. There is ability in me yet; it only needs the incitement of your smile. With that I can go abroad with you—to Europe or South America. I can toil for the money to take us there. Under the name of Edward Hanchett I can gain wealth, and we can live as we please. Turn away from me now, and——"

"What then?" she calmly asked.

"For you—I know not what! You may interpret your own heart and answer what will be before you, till the tomb shall mercifully receive you. As for myself, the question is not hard to answer. There will be before *me* despair—the grasping of the first desperate venture that comes my way, and then—welcome death!"

Through the gathering gloom of the night I heard a sound that thrilled me through. It was her sob!

I reached out for her hand in the dark; she did not refuse it now. Nay, as I held it, a tear from an invisible fount fell upon it.

"The woman is always weak," she passionately exclaimed as she drew her hand away. "Always weak where she should be strong, and yielding where she should be stern. Let me tell you, sir, you have not beguiled me from the duty I had assumed. I will put it to you plainly: You have sinned deeply, but not irreparably. Go back; acknowledge your error; call your conscience to your help, summon your strength, and resume the life you have thrown away."

"And is this what you would say to me? Is it for *this* that you have raised me to the height of expectant happiness, only to dash me down to hell again?"

"It is for this that I had you brought here. Think—consider! God's warning speaks to you above my weak voice; twice, lately, have you lain at death's door and have been brought back to life.

Can you not see in this the outstretched hand of Providence? I am a woman, but I bow in fear and trembling before such manifestations as these. I implore you to heed them."

I answered her with an impatient exclamation.

"You will not listen?" she said, warming with her emotions. "If you are deaf to me now, then may God help you!—you will be lost forever. Think of the wife you have deserted——"

"She is far better off without me."

"Think of what may happen; nay, of what is sure to happen, should you leave this hideous deception stand, and keep yourself buried under a false name somewhere. As time passes, Weldon Hunt will woo and win your wife; he will marry her; they will innocently enter into a bond which the law cannot sanction. Are you willing to allow your wife to commit bigamy, even innocently?"

"I am perfectly indifferent about it," was my answer. "Since Georgia Gorman's husband is dead and buried, I care not how soon she remarries, or whom she makes her new husband. Why should I care? Never quote the law to me; the law unites hands, but it cannot unite hearts. I tell you plainly, my past life is absolutely closed and sealed. Whether I am to have a new one, or only to languish in the dregs of existence, depends upon you. Assuring you that I will never resume my former name, never go back and acknowledge myself a colossal cheat and liar, I think I am safe in believing that you will not betray me to Georgia or to Hunt. I am willing that they should be happy in their own

way; but, as you will see, their happiness depends upon your silence."

She wrung her hands

"I must be silent; I could never blast the happiness of a sister-woman, when I might secure it by silence. But—oh, God!—how monstrous! What a hideous secret for me to keep! Man! be moved. Do not put this dreadful burden upon me, with all else that you make me bear. Have mercy upon me—upon Georgia—and go back!"

She never once stirred me with her pleading.

"I have decided, Julia," was my reply. "You have heard me; there is nothing further to be said. More than man ever gave up for woman I have sacrificed for you. In your hands is the decision; you can ban or bless me. Which shall it be?"

Her sad, low sobbing came to my ear. She rose from the seat.

"I am weary," she said, tremulously. "I cannot talk longer with you. Let me go."

"But this will not be the end? You will see me to-morrow?"

"Oh, why should you wish it? Have I not spoken?"

"Julia Bement, you never have known my heart. Give me the chance, and I will make you know it. May I talk with you again to-morrow night—in this place?"

We stood face to face in the dark. I could not see her; I could not mark the emotions of her countenance, but I could feel the fluttering and trembling of the hand that she voluntarily gave me.

"I will," she said, 'if you wish it. Now let us part in friendship and peace. I have done my best; I cannot turn you from your mad way; I leave you with God. May He be merciful to you—and to yours!"

I might have been presumptuous enough to offer to kiss her; but she eluded my embrace and glided swiftly from me. Not until another day did I realize the deep significance of her words, the mournful prophecy that was in them.

Following her immediately, I saw her joined by Leon Gardette near the back veranda. We all passed a pleasant evening with the old people, and soothing music speeded the hours.

CHAPTER XV.

A STUNNING DISCLOSURE.

WE ADJOURNED to the parlor. Monsieur and Madame, happy in the apparent happiness of those about them, smiled, nodded, applauded the vocal and instrumental efforts at entertainment, and frequently resorted to pure French for expressions of approbation and satisfaction. Julia conversed lightly—with an effort, I thought—and when asked by Leon Gardette, did not refuse to go to the piano, and in her rich contralto voice rendered some of the solos from the popular operas of the day. Gardette followed with his guitar, and to his own accompaniment sang some French songs, in which the frequent repetition of the words "*l'amour*" showed their character. I had nothing to contribute to the evening's enjoyment; nothing but a moodiness arising from a bitter sense of defeat. But Madame treated me as airily as though I had been the most exuberant member of the circle.

"Monsieur Hanchett is recovering his good health so fast," she chirped, "that he ought not to be dull. Can he not sing?—play?—can he do nothing to amuse us? Come, M'sieur—you are challenged."

I made my excuse as best I might; and presently, to my relief, the time for retiring came. A hurried whisper I was able to send to Julia's ear,

"Do not forget that you promised to hear me again to-morrow night."

"I do not forget," she answered in the same tone; and then she spoke aloud. "Good rest, sweet dreams, heaven's peace to you all, fair friends!" she said, with that smile which had entranced me long before, and she vanished up the broad stair.

Did I see aright? Was it on *me* that her glorious eyes rested last, with tender sorrow, with pitying look? Ah, God—that look was indelibly stamped upon my brain; I remember it now, for I never saw her more! Never—never more!

I arose next morning from a sleepless bed, dressed myself, and walked in the garden. On the bench where Julia and I had sat a ribbon had fallen from her hair; I pressed it to my lips and carefully put it away in my pocket. Sitting where, in the gloom of that evening which was to be forever memorable in my strange history, she had wrung my heart, I asked myself, What hope is left? There was one, a frail one; but I clung to it desperately. She had not commanded me to go away; she had even engaged to hear me again on the evening of this present day. As we easily believe what we wish to believe, I took heart at the reflection. Strong and positive as her expressions had been, yet this consent seemed to show a hesitation, as though her mind was not yet fully made up.

Presently Leon Gardette joined me. He was suave and smiling, and began with an apology.

"I trust I did not intrude upon you and Ma'm'-

selle last night," he said. "I did not intend it, and beg a thousand pardons if I offended."

"There was no offense, Monsieur Leon," I hastened to say.

"Thank you. It relieves me to know it. You are early up, for one who has so lately been an invalid. Your eyes look hollow. What is the matter?"

"I did not sleep well."

"You need the bracing of exercise. I have not given you any for three days. What say you to a gallop after breakfast?"

I consented, and we returned to the house, chatting on indifferent subjects. Always blithe and buoyant as I had known him, his spirits upon this morning were unusually elastic. Julia did not appear at the table, and Madame, kindly solicitous, dispatched a servant to see if she were ill. The girl came back, reporting that Ma'm'selle had a headache and begged to be excused.

"Ah, it is you gallant gentlemen that are to blame!" said the old lady, shaking her finger at us. "Monsieur Hanchett must keep her out in the garden in the dew; and you, *enfant* Leon, like a thoughtless boy, must urge her to sing and play till the good, kind creature is exhausted. I shall look to it that she is better taken care of."

"Monsieur Hanchett does not take good care of himself," said Leon, as he sipped his coffee. "He has confessed to me that he passed a bad night, and he has promised to take another equestrian tonic with me."

"That is well," the old gentleman remarked. "But not too much exercise for him, mind! Do not make him ride far."

"Only a few miles," returned the son, carelessly.

In an hour two spirited horses, well equipped, were at the door, with a third, ridden by the black groom who always attended us on our rides. As we were about to mount, a small uproar inside was heard, and little Ninette came limping out, convulsed with tears and sobs.

"Where do you go, M'sieu' Hanchett?" she cried. "Are you going to leave us?"

"No, child; only for a short ride. What troubles you so?"

She gave a fresh burst of weeping.

"You heard dear Ma'm'selle tell me last night that I might come to her early this morning; but Cassy will not let me; she says Ma'm'selle is sick. I came to tell you, and you are going away. It makes me sick, too; I want somebody to be *very* kind to me."

I soothed the poor little creature, promising to return soon, bring her a small present, and tell her a story. I looked back as we reached the road. My last sight of the Gardette mansion gave me a picture of the child leaning on her crutch and gazing wistfully after me, while Madame waved her handkerchief from a window.

We galloped on side by side for a few moments in silence, my companion choosing the way. Presently I inquired:

"Is not this the road to Natchez?"

"Yes," he answered. "A pleasant road, too. Over and back makes a good ride."

Nothing either in his manner or speech had impressed me with the idea that anything unusual was about to occur; nor did it seem at all extraordinary, after we had ridden through the streets, and reached the park along the brow of the hill, that he should propose to dismount and rest. He directed the servant to lead our horses away a little; then he threw himself down on the greensward, produced some cigars, and burst into a rhapsody of talk.

"Come, now, M'seur, lie here at your ease with me, and let us do absolutely nothing for half an hour; nothing but to talk and dream. Do you know what the rapture of idling is?—*loafing* is the English word, which perhaps expresses the idea much better What a glorious panorama we have in yonder long stretch of our great, wide river, with its craft passing up and down! Nature does nothing by halves, here in America; everything is on a grand scale. Have you traveled in Europe, *mon ami?* No? Well, I'll tell you that it would be hard to match that immense stream over there. The Rhine, of course, is more picturesque and historic, the Rhone and the Moselle are more beautiful, the Danube has a savage grandeur of its own, the Thames—faugh!—the Thames is but the receiving-sewer of London. None of them have the sweep, the amazing volume of water that you see yonder, in your not misnamed Father of Waters. And, by the way, since you leave us to-day, which direction will you take—up or down? New Orleans or St.

Louis? You can catch a steamer here for either place before noon."

I regarded him with speechless astonishment. A sickening suspicion made me faint. He glanced at me coolly, with a look of semi-defiance, I thought, between his cigar-puffs.

"You seem surprised," he continued. "I can understand why you might be. I have been playing a part during the last month in my relations with you; it has not been an agreeable business for me, but strange circumstances have made it necessary. You are a person, M'sieur, who creates surprising situations wherever he goes, and who makes a necessity for unusual defensive measures against him. You shall hear all I have to communicate before bidding you a farewell, which must positively be a final one; but it will be well to advise you plainly, to begin with, that, as against so accomplished an intriguer as *M. Edward Hanchett*, no ordinary weapons could be depended upon."

The cool irony of his manner and language, and the marked emphasis that he placed upon the name I had assumed, stung me. In that moment the humiliating thought came to me that I was not only defeated, but duped. He went straight on with his talk while I was collecting myself for the questions that pressed me.

"I may admit, M'sieur, that this enforced and somewhat abrupt style of departure is not consonant with the well-known standards of Southern hospitality; nor is it agreeable to the social customs of *La Belle France*, where I was educated. Indeed, my

respected father and mother will have some difficulty in comprehending the explanation that I must give them, to justify myself in not bringing you back with me; and as for those affectionate little imps, my nieces, especially poor Ninon, who have become attached to you—really, Monsieur—may the devil take the whole business! I have been trying to send you away with a laugh and a jest; but it won't do. It is a painful, a distressing affair, and I ask you not to make it more annoying to me than is necessary."

His light manner suddenly changed with the last words; he sat up, bit his cigar in two, threw away the pieces, and gave me a hard stare.

"Do you know my story?" I demanded, seizing at random a point of beginning with him.

"Yes."

"All of it?"

"The whole. It became necessary that I should be told, as the counterplot to meet your plot was formed. I was informed of it nearly as long ago as the date of my answer to the letter that you wrote from St. Louis to—to a lady of my father's household."

"And *she* told you?"

"Of course. What else could she do? In some way she must needs protect herself from your importunities; to that end she must have a confidant. I had the honor to be chosen."

"Cruel, false woman!" I groaned.

Leon Gardette's eyes glittered.

"Monsieur forgets himself," he said, trying hard

to keep his temper. "Let me say to you that the lady told me your well-nigh incredible story under a solemn pledge of secrecy. That pledge I shall as sacredly observe, no matter how much you provoke me. Indeed, my parents shall never know the revolting truth; I will do my best to convince them that you left me here to-day to save the distress and pain of a formal parting by and by. Please remember all this, M'sieur, and try to restrain your tongue. You, who so little deserve it, have been treated with rare consideration. It little becomes *you*, remembering the past that is behind you, to use the words 'cruel, false woman' toward *her*."

I became furious under his just reproof.

"You have no right to make yourself the champion of Julia Bement," I cried. "She gave you a hint to that effect last night. You are nothing at all to her. Nor will I leave these parts until I see her again. I have an appointment to meet her this very night."

His eyes shone with triumph as he heard me. His time had come!

"Ah, Monsieur, undeceive yourself. The lady does not wish to meet you again; she knows that you have left the Gardette mansion forever, and she is relieved by the knowledge. As for becoming her champion—you will admit that I am the proper person, when you learn the truth. Be calm as you can, M'sieur, while I tell you that—she whom you call Julia Bement is my wife!"

CHAPTER XVI.

OUTCAST!

I RAGED with passion as I heard that astounding declaration. I sprung up and glared upon him.

"It is a lie!" I shouted. "A base, vile falsehood."

His cheek reddened, but he kept his temper.

"Monsieur Hanchett," he quietly replied, "according to the military code of honor with which I am familiar, and with which you should be familiar, the words you have just permitted yourself to use would call for the blood of one of us. But I pass by the insult. I remember that you have, or think you have, provocation for them; I recall the miserable condition in which you have placed yourself. Moreover, you must know that I am bound by the most solemn promise to *her*—to my wife—not to injure you. For her sake, I endure such an insult as I never submitted to before from mortal man. Yet, I can hardly call it an insult; you are beside yourself with rage and disappointment. Miserable man! I pity you. For *her* sake I have borne with you, pretended that I did not understand your attitude toward her, and restrained myself, seeing you near her, when I could have struck you dead, knowing your base efforts to win her away from honor and duty; and she my wife!"

His words sounded meaningless in my ears. I could not get beyond the dread fact that he had stated.

"Your wife?" I feebly questioned. "Julia *your wife*—your wedded wife? No; I will not believe it! You are deceiving me. I will return to the mansion, and have my appointed interview with her to-night."

"I did not hope to convince you out of my own mouth of the truth of what you have heard," he quietly rejoined. "I foresaw that it might be necessary to provide myself with a witness that could not be gainsaid. Look at *that*."

He took from his vest-pocket a little roll of paper and tossed it to me. I read the confirmation of his words in her own handwriting:

To E. G.:—After our meeting of last night, I feel that everything must end at once between us. Again I tell you, that, at the risk of being misconstrued by you, I have only been laboring to bring you to a sense of your folly and sin; to persuade you to retrace your steps. You will not; you are possessed of a blind infatuation. I will not see you again; it can tend to no good. My husband will deliver you this. Farewell forever! Your wretched secret shall be kept. JULIA GARDETTE.

I crushed the paper in my hand and fell upon the grass. My companion sprung to my assistance; I repulsed him.

"You are overcome," he said. "You cannot bear to hear more."

"I have heard the worst; the details are of small

account. But tell it all; let the whole agony be revealed—and I will bear it, or die here. Go on."

"She became my wife at Vicksburg, last July. You were on the boat, it seems, when we came aboard, on our return home. The marriage has been kept secret since; it is told to you first. There were reasons why it could not be made public."

"Some spell was on her," I wildly protested. "She never loved you; she never can."

His cheek paled. I saw that I had touched him.

"As to that," he fiercely replied, "I will discuss with no man whether the woman who has sworn to love, honor and obey me, loves me or does not love me. Least of all will I discuss it with *you*. She is my wife, loyal and true to me. She has striven with all the fervor of a noble woman to restore you to your own wife, and to the grand position and opportunities that you have thrown away. Absolutely blameless as she has ever been, she has keenly felt the inward reproach that your astonishing fall was due to your untempered passion for *her*. She felt that, in honor and conscience, she must try to win you back to yourself and to your better nature. Well, she has made the trial; she has compelled me to be a restive and unwilling helper in the scheme. It has failed. I love her better than ever, for the great heart that could devise such a plan. And let no man say that she does not love me! You, who have madly risked everything for her, and failed, know that she is not the woman to wed where she cannot love."

"Your wife!" I repeated, half-dazed. "Still, I

cannot comprehend it. You say it has been kept secret. How was it?—why was it?"

"Ah! it makes a story by itself!" He deliberately bit another cigar, and lay at half-length while he smoked, and briskly talked. "I told you that you should know all, now; you shall. You have heard, I suppose, how I accidentally met her at Wycaseo last spring? Well, it appears, from the story she told me, that you loved her at first sight, having no right to do so. I saw her there, and loved her, being free to win her if I could. And I said to myself then, 'If I do not marry that woman, I never shall marry at all.'

"Her anxiety to leave Wycaseo, for a reason that I could not then know, was made known to me; I succeeded in bringing her to my father's house as governess. All were charmed with her; my passion grew stronger with each day. I made myself agreeable to her from the first. I was hopeful that time would make her mine; yet it might have been a year, two or three, perhaps, before I would have dared to urge my suit to that grand woman—but for *you*."

"For me?" I echoed. "What had I to do with it?"

"Very much, as you shall hear. From the first day of my acquaintance with her at Wycaseo I saw that she was living under a shadow. Not to others, but to me, the fact became very plain after she was installed in our home as governess. I marked her swift look of inquiry when strangers were introduced; I saw her nervous start when letters were

brought her. She had not been long with us when one came to her, forwarded from Wycaseo. I saw the original post-mark; it was Montville, N. Y. She was agitated by it, and kept her chamber for half a day after receiving it.

"Later, I drove over to Natchez, one day, with her and Madame. We happened to go into the hospital while there; my dear mother is ever full of sympathy for the unfortunate, and never goes to the city without a large gift of fruit and flowers for the hospital. In one of the cots we saw *you*.

"'A bad case,' the doctor told us; 'a Northern man taken down with the yellow fever. There are ninety-nine chances out of a hundred against him; yet he may pull through.'

"Julia started and turned pale when she saw you. As we drove home, Madame slept soundly, from fatigue and heat. Then Julia confided in me just a little. She told me that the yellow-fever patient we had seen was a man who was cruelly persecuting her, and that he had probably come here for that purpose. She begged me to quietly have him sent away when he became convalescent.

"I promised, unquestioningly; I would have done anything that she could require. You were sent up to St. Louis, M. Hanchett; and I may tell you that the letter which you sent to her from the Natchez hospital hastened your departure.

"Next came your letter from St. Louis. She brought it to me in tears, telling me how it should be answered. I silently complied, holding my peace, certain that the agitation of mind that you were in-

flicting upon her by these approaches would soon cause her to reveal everything to me.

"So it was. One day I found her alone, sad and despondent. I saw my opportunity; I urged her to confide fully in me, promising to help her. She was irresolute; I persisted. As I grew bolder I laid my heart at her feet. She hurriedly left me upon this declaration; but, two days after, I found an opportunity to renew it.

"And she consented! Tell me not that she did not love me; why, else, would she have made me supremely happy?

"She told me all; with her hands in mine she told me all. The revelation appalled me for an instant; but soon, in passionate words, I dedicated my life to her.

"'I must be saved from him,' she said with a shudder. 'I wish he could be saved to himself and his wife, and the career he has thrown away; but, first, I must be saved from him! He is dreadful in his resolution; I know him well. He will stop at nothing to find me, to compel me to yield to his unlawful persuasions. I want to be protected from him.'

"You have already conceived what followed. I urged her to give me a husband's right to protect her; I obtained her consent. A necessary errand to Vicksburg was fabricated for her; I escorted her there; she came back as my wife, unknown to the others of the household.

"I had not time to smooth matters with my parents; Julia's need of a protector was urgent, and

with that accomplished we could wait a favorable opportunity to placate Monsieur and Madame. My mother, I knew, had looked for a high alliance for me; much as she loved Julia, time would be required to reconcile her to the idea that her only son should wed the governess. But only a little more time will open the way for her approval; I am certain of it. With *you* removed as a disturbing element, life ought to flow on happily with us.

"What more shall I say? Hard as I labored against Julia's resolution to have you brought to the house in your convalescence, I was compelled to submit. Man! did ever woman act more nobly? Think of it! Prevailing against her husband, insisting on taking the enemy of her peace beneath the roof that sheltered her, that he might be not only nursed to life, but that he might, if possible, be redeemed from the demon within him! Monsieur, you are defeated; you are utterly cast down; yet can you not admire the loftiness of the soul of her who, refusing to love you when you had no right to be loved, yet tried so hard to save you? Oh, it is grand; there is no woman like my Julia!"

I turned wearily and impatiently from him. I bent my head upon my breast; in the words of a great sinner I cried out to myself, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

For a few minutes Leon Gardette considerately left me to my misery. Then he put a hand on my shoulder.

"My friend, I don't judge you," he said with kindness. "Circumstances make and unmake us all.

You are wretched; I am blest; a very little, perhaps, might have reversed our positions. I pity you; God knows how I pity you, without judging. Don't think hard of me; in better days, under other circumstances, we two would have been fast friends. As I bid you farewell forever, let me take you by the hand."

I shook my head and turned sullenly away.

"At least," he urged, with overflowing kindness in his voice, "you won't refuse one gift at parting. Whatever your life may be from this time out, it will be a new life; there will be nothing in the past that you can turn to for aid if you wish to do so. Have I not established the right to help you from my abundance, by reason of all that has occurred? Here in this pocket-book are five hundred dollars; you can do me no greater favor than to accept it."

I refused with a surly gesture. I heard his soft "Farewell, *mon ami!*" and then the sound of the horses' gallop dying away in the distance. I looked around; as he disappeared from my sight I saw him wave his hand to me.

Then came the crowning humiliation. Stripped of everything, bankrupt in all that men hold dear, I was going out into the world to make a futile struggle until it crushed me. The pocket-book which my hand refused had fallen at my feet; I took it up and put it away. Then I went down to the landing to wait for the New Orleans boat.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE LAVA-BEDS.

IT WAS in November, 1872, under a sullen, rainy sky, that four companies of United States infantry made their bivouac in the Klamath country of Oregon. They were on the edge of the lava-beds. That vast desolation of rocks and pits, of deep chasms and frowning natural barriers, the remains of the volcanic eruptions of old ages, stretched out before them; and in these impregnable recesses were hidden and sheltered the cruel, crafty foe that these soldiers had been sent to conquer. I was one of this detachment.

From the time of my parting with Leon Gardette my course had been steadily downward. It was bound to be so. Cut off from hope, the past was a blank, the future offered nothing but weariness. Times there were, indeed, when I tried to take heart of hope; when, in an hour of exhilaration, I planned various large careers of adventurous daring in all quarters of the globe. I would go to Africa, and in its barbarous wilds surpass the discoveries of this century and the last. I would join one of the Arctic expeditions. There might be a field for me in Egypt or Turkey, the resorts of soldiers of fortune from the entire civilized world. These were but a few of the vain and hopeless schemes that I planned in

those days, to give me another hold on life and action. Vain—oh, how vain! The shadow of the dreadful past—the utter ruin that I had in a few brief months wrought for myself—was ever upon me, numbing me into a lethargy of soul. In my mocking humor, on leaving New York, I had said to myself, "You are dead!" Now, when I endeavored to plan a new existence, the demon who chuckles over the lost was industriously whispering in my ear, "Remember that you are dead! You are dead to all men and women who ever knew you; dead to life, to hope, to love, to honor; dead to yourself!"

So for the next eighteen months I drifted aimlessly about the cities of the great river, living a life that is now a blank to me—as it had better be. When my money was exhausted, I went to a recruiting-office and enlisted for five years as a private soldier.

Men who have worn eagles upon their shoulders and led battalions in war had come to that before me, but never, I thought, through such dark and devious roads as mine!

Four and a half years I had been serving at various frontier posts, scrupulously doing my duty, always known to my officers as a good soldier, but a morose, crabbed kind of a fellow. On several occasions that I recall, I was required to report to officers who had come to their present positions from the great volunteer armies of 1861–'65; more than once I recognized, in the man whom I respectfully saluted, one whom I had commanded in those days More than once, too, I observed a start and a close

look of inquiry, as something in my face carried the thoughts of my superior back to the stirring times of the war. But my life-secret was safe; I was too much changed by disappointment and suffering to fear recognition; I had been too long buried ever to be resurrected in this world.

Still, these chance collisions, these reminders of something that I had been, were dramatically awakening to me. They stalked suddenly before me like the ghosts of my dead self; their voices were to me as the feeble shriek of the man overboard in the raging Atlantic, appealing for the rescue that never can reach him. They hardly pained me; time and renewed agonies of mind had dulled the edge of suffering; but they never failed to penetrate the shell in which I had sheathed myself from the world, and awaken memory. I believe it was at the commandant's headquarters at Fort Dodge, in the winter of 1870, that I overheard the following conversation between the Colonel and my Captain.

"Captain Stubbs, who is that fellow there at the desk, that I had detailed from your company for a clerk?"

"Private Hanchett. A very good soldier, sir, though an odd kind of fellow; never has anything to say, more than is necessary. He must have had some advantages; writes a good hand, and is quick with the pen."

"Yes, all that I have learned since I've had him here. But who the devil is he, anyway?"

"Well, sir, all I know of him is, that he was sent to us about two years ago from the New Orleans

recruiting-station. There was a pretty bad record came with him; the police there knew him as a gambler, and by spells a heavy drinker. I heard that it was after a long debauch that he enlisted. But since he's been with us, there has not been charge or complaint against him."

"Don't you know anything of him back of the time you speak of?"

"Nothing, sir."

The Colonel whistled and drummed on the arm of his chair.

"Captain Stubbs, call him in here," he said.

I appeared in the commandant's office, assumed the "position of a soldier," and saluted. My hair was cropped short; my face clean shaven; I wore the plain dark-blue blouse and light-blue trousers of the private soldier. The glass showed me, when I cared to look into it, that my head was grayed in a ring all about the lower part, and in patches on top; that my eyes were sunk and hollow; my cheeks seamed with wrinkles. And yet, it appeared, there were some lingering remains of my former self that could attract casual attention.

"Hanchett," the Colonel abruptly asked, "were you in the late war?"

"No, sir."

"Did you ever see *me* anywhere before you enlisted?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir."

"Ever know a man named Gorman?"

"No, sir."

"That will do. You may return to your desk."

My right hand goes up to the side of my head again, palm outward; I turn with a mechanical "about face," and march back to the "consolidated morning report." With eyes on my papers, but ears attentive, I hear the explanation of this proceeding:

"It is one of those singular cases of accidental resemblance, Captain, which we often find in novels, and more rarely in real life. In '62 I was a lieutenant in the infantry of the Army of the Potomac. The senior Colonel of the brigade was a New York man, a dashing fellow named Ellard Gorman. He was one of the best volunteer officers I ever knew; would certainly have got two stars had he stayed and seen the thing out. And although the fellow at the desk yonder is much older than Gorman would be now, there is a strong resemblance to him in the upper part of the man's face; especially the eyes. Sometimes I've seen Hanchett look up suddenly, when there would be so much of brave Colonel Gorman's expression in those eyes that he has absolutely startled me. It rather gives an inveterate novel-reader like me a sense of relief to learn that there are actually such chance likenesses outside of the romances. It's altogether stranger than anything like the 'Corsican Brothers' business, for there is every reason why twin brothers should bear a marked resemblance."

"What became of the officer you speak of?"

"He left us after Chancellorsville, went home, and was making a great success in politics, I heard. About four years ago I read the account of his death in

New York City. Accident of some kind; a crush or a panic in a crowd—I don't just remember what. Heigh-ho! So it goes. He was a grand fellow!"

"Colonel, I shouldn't wonder if I could explain the resemblance of my man to your volunteer officer."

"You can? Let's hear it."

"Colonel Gorman was fond of the military service, I take it?"

"Oh, yes. He liked it, and was well adapted to it."

"Well, my theory is, that what brings people back from the other world is some strong, overmastering occupation or affection that they have known in this. You have spoken of the 'Corsican Brothers;' that was the motive there, you remember. Now, I suppose that your Colonel Gorman, departed this life, can't shake off the associations of his old army experience. From some near corner of the Elysian Fields he hears the bugles and the drums at Fort Dodge, and his spirit is so powerfully invited back that he comes down and joins our post. And since military regulations and a natural delicacy in superseding yourself prevent his taking command, he seizes on a good soldier of 'B' Company, inhabits his hard-tack-and-bacon-consuming system, and occasionally looks out at you through his eyes."

"Stubbs, get along with you! When you leave the army, take my advice, and don't set up for a small wit. You'll make a dismal failure of it."

Under the sullen, rainy sky, there at the edge of

the lava-beds, we crouched beneath our blankets, denied the fire necessary to make coffee, as that might render us the targets for hostile bullets from scores of Modoc rifles not far away. We lay there munching hard bread and waiting for the work which it was sure the morrow would bring. Withdrawn from all others, I dozed and woke by turns; and at times, in waking moments, heard the voices of those about me in suppressed tones as they talked (soldiers always do) of the prospect before us. They criticised, grumbled, occasionally swore under their breath; and when the time should come, each man of them would do his duty. Death and wounds were part of their trade.

"We're sent up here to be murdered, as others have been before us," said one. "The bloody rascals are safe behind the rocks and in the pits; they can pick off every one that tries to get to them."

"Nothing but stupid butchery," another indignantly observed. "Will they put us all in?"

"A company at a time, I hear. Ours goes first. I heard some of the officers talking."

"Will the Lieutenant command us?"

"No; I heard them say our Captain had come up and was going to handle us."

"Our Captain? Didn't know we had one. Haven't seen any in this company for two years."

"New man, they say; been on detached service; never with the company before."

"Wonder if he knows the scrape he's getting into?"

"He'll find out soon enough."

Other fragments of talk came to my ears and passed unheeded. What the morrow might bring was a matter of indifference to me—who would command, who would fall, who survive, what Fate had in store for me. Why should I care? I deemed myself now superior to shock or emotion; yet even at this late day and in this savage situation another pang was preparing for me. It came with the morrow.

Our company was in line before daylight, waiting orders. With the Lieutenant I saw a strange officer. There was a double-barred strap on his shoulder; his face was away from me as he talked with his subaltern.

It was after daylight when our orders came. I was near enough to hear them.

"Captain Gardette, the General directs you to deploy your company as skirmishers, advance cautiously but steadily, and develop the position of the enemy. If possible, drive them."

Captain Gardette! He turned, and I saw his face. The man with whom I had parted years before on the Natchez hill was here to face death with me.

He spoke just a few words ere deploying us from the center, right and left.

"This will be stern work, men! Stick to it! Don't flinch! You may take all the cover you can find; but you must keep moving! Fire at will! Bugler, sound the order!"

Stretched out in a long line, with intervals of six

yards from man to man, we ascended the rocks and moved on. Stooping, crouching, sometimes on hands and knees, we slowly penetrated this dismal solitude, guided by the occasional notes of the bugle in the rear, sounding "Halt!" "Forward!" "To the left!" "To the right!"

The direction was constantly an ascending one; constantly was the way more difficult. The pits grew deeper; the rocks that walled them were higher. As we went on, bullets sung through the air, often striking the rocks. From one point of shelter and another I saw above us puffs of smoke rising over the stony barriers that Nature had set up against us, and all along our line a scattering, irregular fire was delivered that way. I fired, and loaded and fired again with the others, well knowing that I was likely to hit nothing but rocks. All the advantage was with our hidden foes. They were not in the least exposed; but men advancing as we were, however carefully, often showed a head or a limb to the searching bullets of the Modocs. I saw several of our wounded making their way back; one soldier I passed lay motionless on his face, with a hole through his head.

At a great shelf of rock I paused, peering carefully around it to find shelter for a further advance. Footfalls and voices behind me caused me to turn my head; there were the Captain and the bugler. The faces of both were very pale, but from different emotions. The bugler was sadly frightened, and crouched closely under the cover; the face of Gardette was white with the pallor of a desperate reso-

lution. In his face, in his eyes, I saw it before he had made another movement.

He saw me, but took no notice of me; I was not recognized. Reaching up with both hands to the top of the shelf, he drew himself up by main strength.

I thought that he meant only to bring his eyes to the level of the top, so that he might take an instant's survey of the field beyond.

No! He raised himself till his knees were on the edge, planted a foot, and quickly stood upright on that high pedestal, motionless as a statue, his field-glass at his eyes.

My own indifference to death had departed with the sound of the first shots; I saw *his* rash exposure, and cried out to him, in warning:

"For God's sake, come down!"

He never answered me, standing there unmoved, while bullets angrily hissed past him and glanced from the rock. For half a minute he stood thus; then he toppled over and fell from the height. I caught him in my arms and laid him down on the hard floor of the pit. His eyes were closed; I knew from the bloody froth on his lips that he had received his death-wound.

I heard the irregular rattle of musketry, the hiss and thud of bullets, the occasional shout of a soldier, and the exulting yells of the concealed foe as they saw a shot well placed. I heard these sounds among the desolate lava-beds, and I heeded them not. I was kneeling by the dying man, wiping the froth from his lips, the damps of approaching death from

his brow, silently awed by the tragic spectacle, but wondering what strange vicissitude had driven him hither from the happiness that had been denied me.

At first I feared he would die and make no sign. His pulse fluttered feebly in his wrist and his hands were growing cold. But a little time before he passed away his eyes opened, and he instantly recognized me.

"*You* here?" he whispered, with a sad smile. "You saw me do it? It is strange that you should be near me at such a time, but it is well. The last time I saw you, you refused my hand. Won't you take it now?"

Time, the fell destroyer, had leveled every barrier between us, and if a new sorrow had been possible to me I might have felt it as I pressed both his chilling hands in mine.

"I don't wonder, though, that you should be here," he went on. "But you don't seem to be trying very hard to get yourself killed. Ah, you are enduring it; you are suffering and living on, just as men will who have nothing but the husks of life left. But it grew too weary for me to bear; I felt that there must be an end to it. I chose this one; men will call it honorable. It will matter little to me what they say of it."

"Why did you do it?"

"Because *she* left me. What is the world to me without her?"

"What is it to you? what would it not be to me, had I been put in your place?" I passionately exclaimed. "You mean to tell me that death has

taken her. Well, that is hard to bear; it might have crazed you; it might have crazed me, in your place. But I tell you, Leon Gardette, that, had my brain survived the shock of holding her dead in my arms, I could have still gone on in the world, desolate, yet comforted by the thought that she had loved me, that she died loving me."

From his dying lips came the words, like a faint echo of my own:

"She did love you; she died loving you!"

It was the one torture that could still rend me. I writhed under it.

"Tell me all, now," I said. "Keep nothing back that I ought to know."

"You shall hear. You knew my jealousy of you, which I could not hide from you; it had a better reason than you suspected. When Julia consented to be my wife, she treated me with dreadful frankness.

"'It will be a sad day for you, Leon, that makes me such,' she said. 'You are noble, accomplished and kind. You deserve, you can gain, the love of some one worthier of it than I. Mine you never can win. It has been given to one who had no right to it, and whose pursuit has made my life since then unhappy.'

"'Let me take all the risk, dear Julia,' I answered. 'As your husband, your protector against him and all the world, your love must come to me in time.'

"She shook her head. 'I wrong you by consenting,' she said; 'but since you urge it, and talk of the misery you would bear without me, I yield. I

seem to have been created to act the part of another Helen of Troy, in my poor way. You see the walls that are shutting me in; it is my destiny. I cannot fly forever from *his* pursuit. I weary of it, and some day my woman's weakness will surrender to his persistence. Oh, heaven! why am I driven to this alternative? The way of honor and duty to myself, to him and his, leads me to give you my hand, Leon; but I warn you—for your own sake, I warn you!—do not take it.'"

A spasm convulsed him; he was able to say but a few words more.

"It was as she said. Her person was mine; her heart, never! She wasted away, lingered but a year after you last saw her, and died. Can you guess what killed her? I would not add one drop to your bitter cup, but I tell you that you wrecked her life, as well as your own."

I bowed my head over him. The fount of tears was not quite dry; one burning drop fell on his hand.

His gentle smile shone upon me in his last moments; he motioned me to put my head down close, and then his arm was thrown about my neck.

"Forgive the custom of the ardent Frenchman," he whispered, with a touch of his old, exquisite politeness. "Ah, *mon ami*—do you remember when I said to you, 'In better days, under other circumstances, we two would have been fast friends?' For one minute, now, let us be friends! You press my hand; you are angry no longer. Shall I tell you what *she* said, at the last? She thanked me for what she called my kindness; and she added:

"'If you ever find *him*, tell him all. Farewell, husband! Do you remember what I have often told you? "There's somewhat, in this world amiss, shall be unriddled by and by."' "

Did she wait for him in the Silence? Does she wait for me?

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN AND OUT OF EDEN.

I RECALL a fanciful story that I read in my boyhood of an unhappy departed spirit, pursued by the memory of his misdeeds, roaming up and down the world to find consolation from some unknown source. At last he was able to discover that his death had conferred a great blessing on several people. It had happened by no virtue of his own; he had left behind him no record of good actions which could have such a result; but the mere fact of his death had, in a remarkable way, put a happiness within the reach of others that they could not possess while he lived. Upon learning which, the perturbed spirit retired again within the shadow, soothed and comforted.

The application of this fragment of old-world folklore to my own case occurred to me at St. Louis in the early spring of 1873. I was just discharged from the army after the completion of my five years' term of enlistment, greatly debilitated from hard service, and with two hundred dollars in my pocket, arrears of pay. Thinking of the troublous question, "What next?" the tale I have mentioned came into my head. Before the next turn of the kaleidoscope of my life, I resolved to act on the suggestion.

As an evil spirit on earth, I surely had cause

enough for uneasiness. It was not enough that I had stranded myself; two other fair lives, at least, had shared in the wreck I had made. But might there not be an offset? May not some blessings have flowed from my death? If so, and I could be permitted to behold them, unrecognized, perhaps my self-imposed punishment would not be so hard to bear.

I came East on that errand.

More than ever I felt secure against recognition in the changes wrought upon me by time, grief and sickness; yet I would take no risks, and so regulated my journey that I reached Montville in the evening. A full moon was up shortly after, without which I could not have seen some things that are briefly to be spoken of.

The place had much grown in seven years. I slowly walked the streets, supported by my cane, took note of large blocks that were new to me, and improvements everywhere. It was a sultry night, such as sometimes comes with the coming of May, and the streets were populous. Yes, the place must have grown in every way since my day.

I would not stop and ask a question, slight as the hazard would be. But I noticed many things that were significant; none more so than the great block with sandstone front on the principal street, with a marble tablet high up, on which was graven "HUNT —1870."

I had come to seek the evidence of other people's happiness—not reminders of myself. Yet here a glimmer of the old feeling of pride in what I had

accomplished, in what I had once been, which was ever present when I was trying to contrive my exit, came back, and for awhile there was an absurd hunger of the spirit to learn that I was still remembered here. I could not inquire, nor seek for printed volumes nor files of newspapers—but a place suddenly occurred to me where silent and grateful testimony might be borne of me. I turned my steps to the cemetery.

Graves, headstones and monuments had thickened; but of the latter, I could without difficulty pick out the conspicuous ones that I had never seen. Almost by intuition I paused before an imposing shaft of Scotch granite, upon whose polished pedestal I read that it was "Sacred to the memory of Ellard Gorman, late Colonel of New York Volunteers, and first Mayor of Montville, who departed this life May 11th, A. D. 1866, aged thirty-three years." Also that the deceased was "A brave soldier and a worthy citizen;" and that this monument had been "Affectionately dedicated to his memory by the people of Montville."

With my strange craving abundantly satisfied, I left the cemetery and sought the mansion where I had passed some years of secret unhappiness. It rose before me very familiar—the great house, with its ornate front, surrounded by shrubberies and gardens. Gleams of light came from windows here and there, while the moon brilliantly illumined the grounds; and, like the somber spirit in the story, I skulked about in the shadows, eager for a glimpse of the heaven within.

I was crouching down behind some bushes near the large piazza, when a little boy of four or five years came out through an open window, and looking about, clapped his hands in childish glee.

"Oh, papa!—mamma!—come out!" he cried. "Come and see the big round moon, and how pretty it makes the garden."

I heard voices within; a man looked out, and for an instant resisted the child's efforts to pull him along.

"Georgia, let us sit out here awhile with Ellard," I heard him say. "The night is mild and the moonlight entrancing."

"In a moment, dear," I heard answered in a musical voice that carried me back ten years at a bound. "Let me call Ellen first, to sit with the baby."

Soon they were sitting together outside; I saw their faces and forms. The boy leaned fondly upon his mother's shoulder; her hand caressed his fair head.

"Sing, mamma; please sing," he asked.

She complied with a sweet and touching ballad. Her husband looked up when she had done, and inquired:

"Georgia, do you know what happened seven years ago to-day?"

"Yes," she answered in a low voice. "I thought of it this morning. May eleventh—the day he died."

"Who died?" the boy questioned.

"Hush, Ellard."

"I want to know," the child persisted.

"It was the man you were named after."

"Was he a good man?"

There was a pause.

"I say, was he good?" the little tyrant demanded.

"Tell him, Weldon." The voice that said it was unsteady.

"Yes, my son; and he suffered a great deal. We named you for him, that we always might be reminded of him."

"Then if he was a good man he went to heaven, didn't he?"

"I hope so," Weldon Hunt's voice answered.

"Oh, husband, it must be so! God has been so good to us, He cannot have permitted him to remain miserable. Last night I dreamed of him; I saw him and Julia together."

"Julia!" Weldon repeated with a start. "That was strange. We do not even know that she is dead."

"Nor do we know that she is alive. You have told me that you have heard nothing from her since she coldly returned your letter soon after Ellard died."

"That was the last. I know not where she is; I lately wrote to Wycaseo, making inquiry, but could learn nothing."

"She must be dead, because in my dream I saw them standing together, hand in hand. All about them it was dark, except that a soft light enveloped their faces and figures; her face was raised to him, and she was smiling. When I awoke the vision seemed still so real that I fervently prayed for their

happiness—for the peace which the world never gave them."

"Amen!"

A tear glistened on the woman's cheek; the man's head was bowed. When they went in, his arm was about her and her head lay on his shoulder, like two lovers in the spring-time of the heart.

Out of those grounds and up the street a shadow flitted. Why call it a man? It had no name, no home, no kin; it had been briefly haunting this place, and would now disappear forever.

Again in New York. I have engaged my passage in the steerage of the steamship Blucher, for Bremen. An irresistible impulse compelled me to do it in the name of Lawrence Galton.

Well, why not? Was that not well? He had taken my name, my personality, in death; he had left me nothing but his name; why should I not have that during the poor remnant of my existence?

The fancy gave me a certain grim pleasure. Something like *post mortem* justice appeared in it.

Once he had bitterly complained to me on one of these streets: "You might be in my place now, if things were different. You may be there yet." The day had come! Worthy of nothing better than to bear his dishonored name, I took it.

There is a note-book in my pocket, in which I have from time to time jotted down memoranda of persons and events. The name "Edward Hanchett" now disappears from the first page; that of Lawrence Galton takes its place.

To-morrow I begin my journey to Nowhere. Oblivion, absolute concealment in some corner of the Old World, are what I seek.

The old thoughts of African exploration, of military service in Turkey or Egypt, have not troubled me of late. I have not the bodily strength left for such projects.

Besides, such adventures would open to me what I dare not seek now—a new career. Notoriety, above all, must be avoided. I conjured to my own destruction in A MODERN MIRACLE. Others have fallen under the blight; in studied obscurity let me save those who remain. And may God be merciful to me, a sinner!

THE END.

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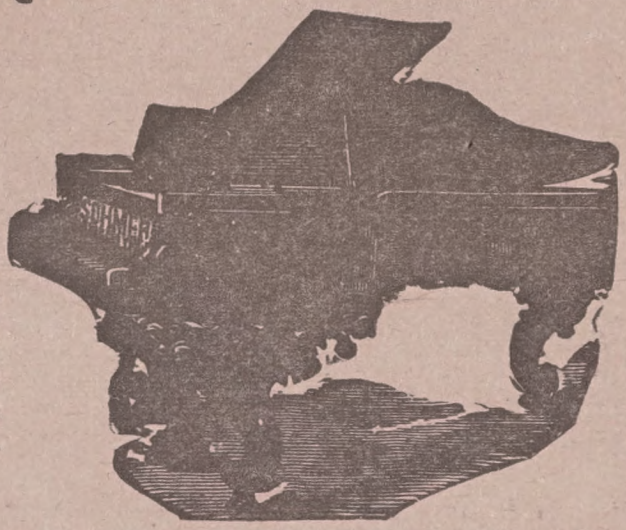

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